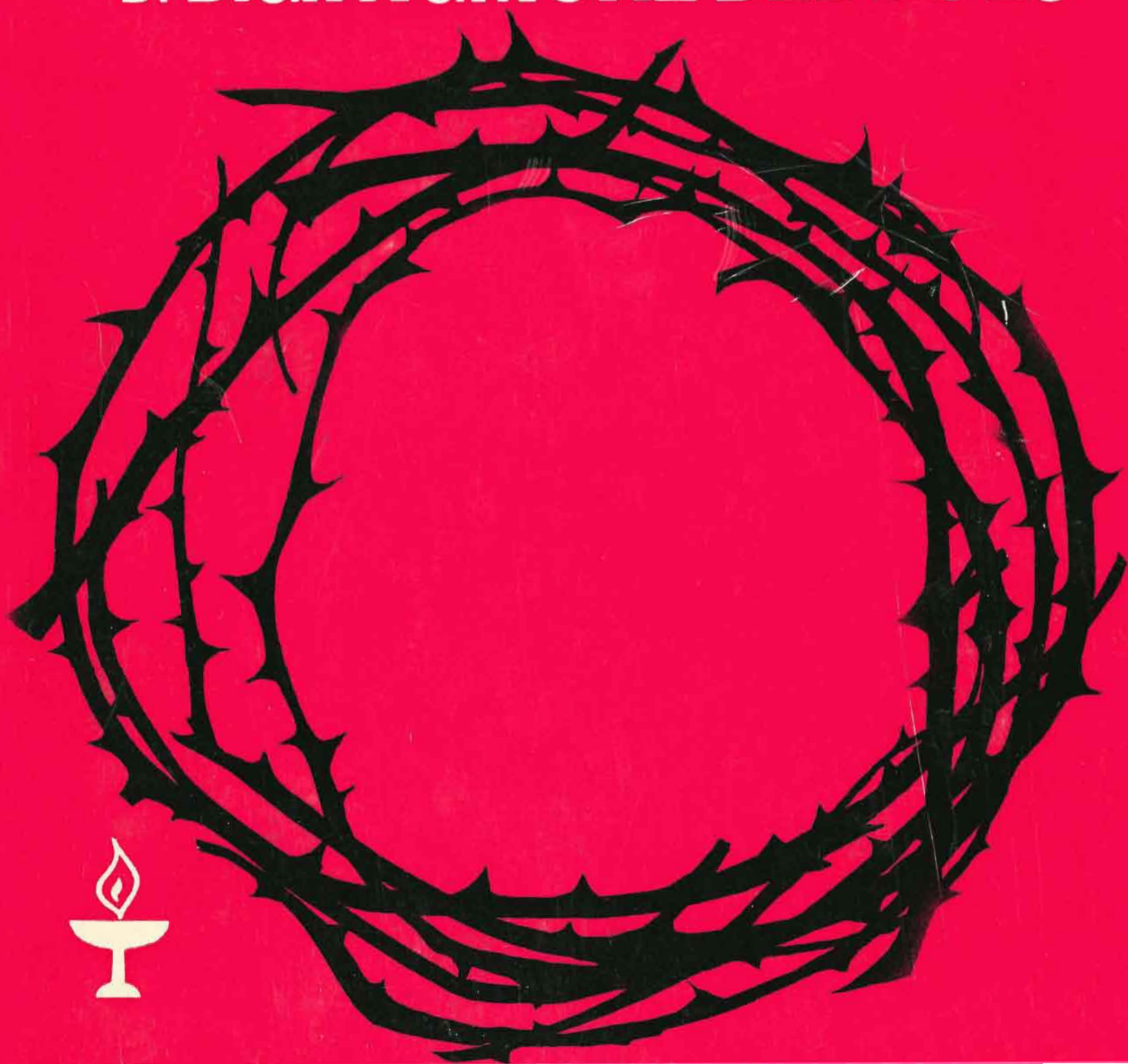


CONCERNING

JESUS

EDITED
BY **D.G. WIGMORE-BEDDOES**



CONCERNING JESUS

A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by

DENNIS G. WIGMORE-BEDDOES



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

After sending the final version of this book to his Publisher, the Rev. Dennis Wigmore-Beddoes was tragically killed in a car crash near his Belfast home. One of the outstanding young Unitarian ministers of his day, his death left a great gap in our ranks, and he will be sorely missed both as a preacher and as a scholar.

It has therefore fallen to my lot to see this book through the press, though I am not theologically expert and could not have been sure of the more scholarly matters without expert help on many problems of New Testament study. I am deeply indebted to the Rev. Dr. L. A. Garrard for kindly reading the proofs and taking immense trouble to suggest minor amendments where these appeared necessary in the interest of clarity.

I must also express gratitude to the Hibbert Trust, which has made a generous grant towards the cost of printing the book. Without this financial aid the volume might not have appeared.

JOHN ROWLAND
(*Publishing Officer*)

P R E F A C E

It is normally assumed that an editor is responsible for the selection and bringing together of the group of authors who contribute to a symposium. In the case of this particular work the editor can claim no such responsibility or credit. It is to Mr Tony Cross that this honour belongs. He it was who a few years ago enlisted a group of younger men within the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland (which latter has a much more definitely Christocentric character and Constitution than the former body) in order to generate some fresh thinking within the Unitarian movement, and especially to attempt to revitalise the latter's attitude towards Jesus. The constituency of the Theological Seminar, which met together for the reading of papers mainly at Manchester College, Oxford, varied during the period which led to the production of this book. Some of the original members, who all consisted of ministers or ministerial students, found it necessary, for non-theological reasons, to drop out, and they had to be replaced by others, one of whom is neither a minister nor a ministerial student, but he was no less welcome as a member of the seminar for that; and in the case of some chapters it was not possible for the amount of discussion by members of the group to take place in the way originally envisaged or felt desirable, because some members found it difficult to be present at our meetings.

In some chapters there will possibly be seen some evidence of the over-spill resulting from discussions within the group. But each author is responsible only for his own work. Neither the editor nor any of the members of the group is responsible

for the views expressed by other members or necessarily fully agrees with them. Indeed, on the part of more than one of the members there would be a rejection of the sharpness of the distinction between the Unitarian and the Christian that is found in some places within these covers. On one point, however, all the members are agreed, viz., that Jesus is important to each, though naturally with a varying extent of general concurrence.

If the editor may at this stage express an opinion, he would suggest that while Unitarianism, as it exists in Great Britain today, tries to adopt a stance that many within its ranks would regard as broader than Christianity, Unitarians should still be mindful of the fact that the origins of Unitarianism lie deep within Christianity, and that by opting out, as some Unitarians do, of the immense amount of fresh thinking that is taking place within Christianity, which in academic circles is now seen to be much more pluriform and open-ended than many have hitherto recognised, they are cutting themselves off from much of the best thinking that is taking place in the world of religion today, and from which, as well as to which, much of great value might be respectively derived and contributed. Naturally enough a work of the character of the present volume can hardly be regarded as a contribution to the kind of engagement just suggested. Rather should it be regarded as a reminder to Unitarians and Free Christians of their origins, and a pointer, or prompter, to directions along which at least some of their thinking might travel. For this reason the chapters have been arranged in such a way that the general reader within the Unitarian and Free Christian constituency may begin by seeing something of the state of affairs with regard to Christology on the contemporary and more recent scene of Christian scholarship, with particular reference to the quest of the historic Jesus, and then pass on after a survey of Unitarian history in its relation to Christ, to a psychological study of "Life in Christ", to an actual attempt at a Christology, followed by a contribution of a more philosophical character, to the question of the relationship of Christianity to the other world religions of today.

All the members of the seminar who participated in the discussions that led to this volume got to know each other very much better and felt that their fellowship together, despite differences of approach and opinion, was mutually refreshing and strengthening; and they hope that even a little of this feeling will be experienced by others who read the book, including those who might not agree with the conclusions of any of them.

Finally, it remains for me very warmly to thank the Publications Committee of the General Assembly for asking me to edit this volume, and also to record the generosity of the General Assembly and the staff of Manchester College, Oxford, for making the whole enterprise possible. And last but not least it must be recorded that to Tony Cross we owe the original vision and initiative that prompted the production of this book. It is with very real sadness that we are obliged to record, too, that, for his own good reasons, he felt it necessary to resign from the Unitarian Free Christian ministry, to the life of which he contributed much.

Dennis G. Wigmore-Beddoes

THE NEW QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS SEEN
FROM A LIBERAL CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT

By D. G. WIGMORE-BEDDOES

THE OLD QUEST

“THE historical Jesus and the Christ of faith” is a phrase that has long been familiar to modern theologians, and especially to Liberal Christians. Indeed, the “quest of the historical Jesus” may be regarded as having been one of the dominant motives behind a great deal of Liberal Protestant research and critical study, and to have provided part of the basis for the religious life of Liberal Protestantism.

Examination of the New Testament, not to mention Patristic literature, reveals that the early Church interpreted the life and significance of Jesus in a considerable variety of ways, and it was the conviction of those who engaged in the “quest of the historical Jesus” that at least some of this interpretation was wrong, and that there was, therefore, a need to get back, through historical research, to Jesus as he actually was.

The classical story of the quest was told by Albert Schweitzer in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which gives an account of various attempts made in this direction, and it covers a period of nearly two hundred years. For the most part the writers

were Germans, and Schweitzer does not examine the various attempts made by English scholars in the same period¹, all of whom, however, owed something to the influence of German writers.

Although lives of Christ continued to be written afterwards, the publication of Schweitzer's book in 1906 is usually regarded as having marked the end of the quest.² After a succession of lives of Christ which generally speaking presented him in terms acceptable to "modern" man, the appearance of Schweitzer's book, which included Schweitzer's own portrait of Jesus as a fanatical figure convinced that the end of the world was near, was a shattering experience. Other lives of Christ had underestimated the eschatological³ element in Jesus' teaching, but Schweitzer stressed it, and one cannot help sensing that a feeling of revulsion played some part in the disinclination that scholars showed towards continuing the quest.

But there was, of course, more to it than that. Schweitzer's survey showed that the various "lives" that were produced reflected the outlook of each writer's own life and times. Thus one could see now the "enlightened" teacher about God and immortality, now the rationalistic teacher of virtue, now the religious genius of the Romantics, now the champion of a more just idea of society, and finally the "bourgeois religiosity"⁴ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—or, as George Tyrrell cuttingly put it, "the Christ that Harnack sees, looking back

¹ He dismisses the Unitarian scholar, Charles Hennell, in a single sentence.

² This statement it must be confessed represents the situation from the Germanic viewpoint which has been so dominant, and which is reflected in many "standard" reference books. In fact, many lives of Christ have since been written—some even by those who have at one time professed to believe the project impossible.

³ "Eschatological" is the term Schweitzer employs, but he would have been more accurate and precise had he used the term "apocalyptic", since eschatology is the broader concept, concerned with all matters pertaining to the end, whereas expectations of violent super-natural intervention are better termed "apocalyptic".

⁴ G. Bornkamm p. 73 in *What can we know about Jesus?* by F. Hann, W. Lohff and G. Bornkamm (1969).

through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face seen at the bottom of a deep well".⁵

It was natural enough, therefore, that, after scholars had seen Schweitzer's "history of history", scepticism regarding the validity of the understanding should supervene.

But scepticism regarding the possibility of reaching the "historic Jesus" was even more encouraged by the development early in this century of *formgeschichte*, "form criticism", the attempt to get behind the literary strata of the Gospels to the oral sources, which attempt, under the influence of Bultmann and others, led to the realisation that the Gospels were the product of faith, and that fact and faith were inextricably bound up together. The units of material out of which the Gospels were composed were designed not for biographical or historical purposes but to meet the needs of the Church in a preaching and teaching situation. To attempt to get through to the "historic Jesus" by the analysis of such material was therefore considered to be futile. "I do indeed think" said Bultmann, "that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus".⁶

More or less coterminous with this was the rise of Barthian theology which emphasised, in its insistence on the absolute "otherness" of God and the supreme importance of the Word, the "Christ of faith". The great Swiss dogmatic theologian, Karl Barth, for whom Christ was so central, could yet say of him: "Jesus Christ in fact is also the Rabbi of Nazareth, historically so difficult to get information about, and when it is got, one whose activity is so easily a little common-place, alongside more than one other founder of a religion and even alongside many later representatives of his own religion".⁷

⁵ G. Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross Roads*, 1963, p. 49.

⁶ R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 1958, p. 14. The book first appeared in German in 1926.

⁷ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 1936, p. 188.

THE NEW QUEST

The quest of the historic Jesus thus came to a virtual end, and therewith a decline in the popularity of the Liberal Protestant interpretation of Christianity, which laid stress on the religion of Jesus rather than religion about Jesus, and which saw Christianity more in terms of following Christ rather than in holding correct beliefs about him.

The quest of the historical Jesus, it was said, had resulted in a distortion and impoverishment of the Gospel. Faith could not be made subject to the vicissitudes of critical opinion, or, as Kahler had earlier put it, to "the papacy of the scholars".

History had survived only as *kerygma*⁸, and in that fact one should not merely acquiesce, but rejoice. It was not the knowledge of Christ "after the flesh" that was necessary: only that of the kerygmatic Christ was able to save. Indeed one can say that whereas the historic Jesus was one of the dominant *motifs* of nineteenth century theology, the *kerygma* is one of the dominant themes of the twentieth.

Besides emphasising that "God was in Christ", Christianity, despite a vague and recurrent tendency towards docetism,⁹ has always insisted upon the full manhood of Christ. But a complete or even a heavily disproportionate emphasis upon the kerygmatic Christ results in a virtual docetism, though Bultmann, for example, protected himself against a charge of absolute docetism by his insistence that Jesus *did live*—and, incidentally, he gave a far fuller portrait of Jesus as rabbi and prophet in *Jesus and the Word* than the previous quotation from him would have suggested as being possible.

⁸ *Kerygma*, the "proclamation" of the early Church about Jesus Christ, centring upon his death and resurrection, and seen especially in the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles. This "proclamation" is now held by many scholars to have had a great influence upon the Gospel material, shaping not merely the content of the Gospels but also their form. An extreme expression of this view would see the Gospels as passion and resurrection narratives with extended introductions. The classic study of the *kerygma* in English is C. H. Dodd's *The Apostolic Preaching*, 1936.

⁹ An early Church heresy that put such emphasis on Christ's divinity that his manhood was conceived of as only apparent, not real.

It is against this largely Germanic and continental background that "the new quest of the historical Jesus" must be seen. Just as in the nineteenth century German theology was successively under the influence of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and, at the turn of the century, Harnack (all representatives of Liberal Protestant theology), so in this century it has been largely dominated by Barth and Bultmann, and is now in a post-Bultmannian phase.

In the main the protagonists of the new quest are pupils of Bultmann. They have taken to heart the Bultmannian insistence upon the importance of the *kerygma*, and they have endorsed the criticisms indicated earlier in this chapter regarding the old quest, to which they have added others, among the most important of them its historical method which was "positivistic", that is to say, governed by the kind of norms that apply in the realm of science. Instead of a view of history that involves simply the verification of facts—names, dates and the sequence of events—and impartial description, they favour the view of history associated with Dilthey and Collingwood—viz., that history is concerned with the intentions, motives and commitments of the people behind the external events, and the meanings which the latter had for them. Whereas nineteenth century biography and historiography sought to discover causal relationships and to classify the particular in relation to the general, modern historiography, stressing the importance of purposive agents, recognises the unique and the creative; and the historian seeks to reconstruct or re-enact in his own mind the thoughts and feelings of those responsible for those past acts. According to this way of doing history, the historian "re-lives" the experience of others, and discovers the "I" in the "Thou". He explores the human spirit and discovers something about himself. This is not to say that the normal methods of historical criticism are abandoned but they are not felt to be enough. The historian must become subjectively involved and experience "an existential encounter" which incidentally has the quality of being

“objective” in that the historian has to suspend his own personal views, in order to be able to hear what the voices of the past are saying about existence. This way of looking at history, of course, meshes easily into the existentialist approach in philosophy that has been so influential on the continent and has therefore a particular appeal there. For the English reader, however, the problems involved in the new quest are not only that he is much less likely than his German colleague to be accustomed to the existentialist approach and vocabulary, which latter can often be complicated and carry subtle nuances, which he may miss, or which may cause him to hesitate as to the interpretation of their precise shade of meaning¹⁰, but also that while in English a distinction is made between history and chronology, when German works are translated into English, “history” has to do double service for two German words, viz., *historie*, which refers to bare, “positivistic” facts, and *geschichte*, which means the interpretation of facts. In other words, “history” has to carry meanings that are different, and which do not correspond to the simple English distinction between chronology and history. Some writers try to alleviate the difficulty by using “historic” for *geschichtlich*, and “historical” for *historische*, but to the ordinary English reader “historic” and “historical” is not a distinction that comes easily to him. and it is not surprising if confusion can sometimes arise. Furthermore it must be remembered that the new quest involves both *historie* and *geschichte*—and that members of this school of thought also make use of the concept of *heilsgeschichte* or “salvation-history”, which, whether understood as by Barthian neo-orthodoxy as a kind of supra-history, or as interlocking or penetrating ordinary history, is only intelligible to faith.

“But what”, the reader may ask, “is the real purpose and motive of the new quest?” Even with all the foregoing “background” the reader will not fully appreciate the answer unless

¹⁰ Note in this connection the works of Fuchs and Ebeling, especially the latter. Cf. the comment of Alan Richardson in *Religion in Contemporary Debate*, 1966, p. 94.

he is reminded afresh that one of the dominant interests of theology in the post-Liberal Protestant era has been the *kerygma*, which, of course, forms the basis of the long development of Christological interpretation that culminated in the Definition of Chalcedon—the classical definition of “the Christ of faith”. The *kerygma* is virtually sacrosanct to the theologians of the new quest school, and, therefore, it is understandable that their object is to try to show—to use the terminology of Käsemann, who is usually credited with having started the new quest in 1953—the “continuity” between the historic Jesus and the *kerygma*, as against trying to show the “discontinuity” between the same, which characterised the efforts of the original quest, although the protagonists of the latter did not refer to the *kerygma* as it had not by that time achieved the status of being a *terminus technicus*.

The way in which this continuity is seen to exist is variously conceived by different protagonists of the new quest. Thus, for example, Käsemann sees it as consisting in the preaching of both Jesus and the early Church. “My own concern”, he says, “is to show that out of the obscurity of the life of Jesus certain characteristic traits in his teaching stand out in relatively sharp relief, and that primitive Christianity united its own message with them”.¹¹ “Jesus did not come to proclaim general religious or moral truths,” says Käsemann, “but to tell of the *basileia* (the Kingdom of God) that had dawned and of how God had come near to man in grace and demand”. Jesus did not, Käsemann thinks, formally claim to be the Messiah, but as an examination of passages that Käsemann considers to be indubitably authentic (the first, second, and fourth “But I say unto you . . .” passages in the Sermon on the Mount, for example shows), Jesus spoke in a manner that placed him above Moses and which revealed that he considered that his message had an eschatological significance. The early church was, therefore, justified in seeing in him the Messiah of its *kerygma*.

¹¹ E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 1964, p. 45. (Lecture, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus” first given 20th October, 1953).

Fuchs, on the other hand, but towards the same end—viz., of seeing the “continuity”—has placed more emphasis on the *conduct* of Jesus. The conduct of Jesus explains the parables rather than *vice versa*. Thus Jesus’ welcoming and forgiveness of sinners explain the father’s forgiveness for and welcome of the prodigal son in the parable, and “Jesus’ conduct explains the will of God, by means of a parable drawn from that very conduct”.¹² What is implicit in Jesus’ conduct, and found in the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, rather than in the titles accorded to him there, is made explicit in the *kerygma*.

In his efforts towards seeing the continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith—or in his terminology the continuity between Jesus as the witness to faith and Jesus as its object—Gerhard Ebeling takes as his key the concept of “faith”, which lends itself well to the subtleties of existential interpretation, but not always towards complete and unambiguous intelligibility for the English reader, for Professor Ebeling tends to write in a sometimes obscure style.

The historical Jesus was the witness to faith in God, not so much through speaking of faith, but through arousing it in others. Now while “between death and resurrection there is no natural continuum”¹³, the real Easter event consists in having a right understanding of the pre-Easter Jesus—“it was not the case of a single additional *credendum* (the fact of the resurrection)”¹⁴—which means seeing Jesus as the source and ground of faith: hence the *kerygma*. It was a case of “the faith awakened by Jesus and founded on his becoming proclaimable”.¹⁵

The most sustained attempt to deal with the problem of the historical Jesus by a member of the new quest school is that

¹² E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, 1964, p. 20—but originally given as a lecture at Zurich in 1956.

¹³ G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 1963, p. 299, but originally published in German 1959.

¹⁴ Ebeling, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

¹⁵ Ebeling, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

contained in Günther Bornkamm’s *Jesus of Nazareth*, which will doubtless come to be known as the classical example of the results of the new quest.

Although at the outset he says “No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus”, he begins—after an introductory chapter on “Faith and History in the Gospels”—in much the same way as an ordinary biographer might with a description of the conditions of the times in which his “subject” lived, and follows this with a chapter entitled “Jesus of Nazareth”, wherein within the space of a couple of pages, he gives what may be regarded as the “hard facts” of Jesus’ life. The amount of material he admits may be small, but yet “these meagre, indisputable facts comprise a very great deal”.¹⁶ This does not conclude the description of Jesus in the chapter and he goes on to discuss Jesus as a prophet and rabbi both in relation to what may be gathered from the Gospel tradition, and to the knowledge we now possess regarding the times in which Jesus lived.

He then devotes the next two chapters, which comprise the major portion of the book, to an exposition of Jesus’ teaching based on the synoptic tradition, and thereby *inter alia* emphasises Jesus’ authority as exceeding that of a rabbi or prophet, and the penetrating quality of his insight and message. What may seem surprising to the reader is the apparently free and sometimes seemingly uncritical way in which Bornkamm uses quotations from the Gospels to establish or illustrate certain points. But towards the end of the book, when discussing “factual” details surrounding the Journey to Jerusalem, the Trial, etc., and the question of the Messiahship, he becomes equally surprisingly sceptical. In these details he sees the intermingling of both historical and legendary material, and he recognises that theological interests have played a part, for example, in influencing the nature and the dating of the Last Supper. But this scepticism is balanced by appeal to history

¹⁶ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1969, p. 55. The first (German) edition of *Jesus von Nazareth* appeared in November 1956.

“in a higher sense”. Thus while admitting that Jesus’ solitary struggle at Gethsemane “should not be read simply as a historical record”, Bornkamm says that the story “is a historical document in a higher sense: it presents Jesus, alone, at the fiercest point of his temptation not as a ‘divine being’, but in his complete humanity”.¹⁷

On the question of Jesus’ Messianic consciousness Bornkamm remains firmly convinced with Bultmann that Jesus made no claim to Messianic titles. Nevertheless, “the Messianic character of his being is contained *in* his words and deeds and in the unmediateness of his historic appearance”.¹⁸ This is not to say, however, that concepts and expectations drawn from Judaism could “exhaust” the “secret of his being”. In fact, says Bornkamm, that secret “could only reveal itself to his disciples in his resurrection”,¹⁹ which means, once again, that the Easter faith is the pivotal point for the “continuity” between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, and in fact in reference to the *kerygma* Bornkamm says, “We note how Jesus’ own message of the coming of the Kingdom of God is heard here again in a new form, only that now he himself, together with his death and resurrection has entered into this message and become the core of it”.²⁰

But how does Bornkamm see the Resurrection? We must make this question the conclusion of this attempt at a brief exposition of the results of the “new quest”.

Bornkamm recognises that the Easter narratives differ considerably in matters of detail, and that they “point back to a much less uniform tradition than the passion stories”, and show that “the tradition here was for a longer time in a fluid state”.²¹ He recognises the gaps and legendary additions. Furthermore, he regards it as a fact that “what is certainly the oldest view held by the Church made no distinction between the resurrec-

¹⁷ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

¹⁸ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁹ Bornkamm, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²¹ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

tion of Christ and his elevation to the right hand of the Father”, and that it was only later that there developed “the theory of the resurrected Christ walking the earth for a time and only subsequently ascending into Heaven”.²²

But this does not mean that Jesus’ resurrection is “only a product of the believing community”. The form in which the message has come down to us is “stamped with this faith”, but “it is just as certain that the appearances of the risen Christ and the word of his witness have in the first place given rise to this faith”.²³

“What became clear and grew to be certainty for the Church was that God himself had intervened with his almighty hand in the wicked and rebellious life of the world, had wrested this Jesus of Nazareth from the power of sin and death which had risen against him, and had set him up as Lord of the world”.²⁴

How important the concept of *heilsgeschichte* is for understanding this kind of approach will be gathered when it is seen that Bornkamm then goes on to say, “It is an event *in* this time and this world, and yet at the same time an event which puts an end and a limit to this time and this world”, and adds, “To be sure only faith experiences this (Acts X.40 ff.), for it cannot be observed and demonstrated like any other event in time and space”.²⁵

CRITIQUE

It is now possible to begin some assessment of the new quest from a Liberal Christian viewpoint. If anyone is disposed to ask “What is the Liberal Christian viewpoint in the 1970s?” he must be content to read between the lines of the following critique, for there is insufficient space in this chapter to give a full answer to this question. It is of the essence of the Liberal Christian viewpoint that while possessing a continuum of basic attitudes it should not remain static. Thus

²² Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

²³ Bornkamm, *loc. sic.*

²⁴ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, pp. 183/184.

²⁵ Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

while the Liberal Christian of the 1970s will be sympathetic towards the Liberal Christianity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, his Liberal Christianity would not be authentic if it were to be merely equated with the latter—a mere carbon-copy of it. It would be true to say, however, that Liberal Christianity is, and always will be, a form of Christianity that seeks to base itself more upon the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth than upon the teaching *about* him; hence the obvious interest in the new quest, in that it opens up the possibility of a fresh look at the historical Jesus.

Before we go further, however, it will be only fair to state that the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith cannot be made absolute—even the “historical Jesus” of the most extreme protagonist of the Jesus of history school must in a sense involve a “Christ of faith”, for any such writer’s picture of the Jesus of history is bound to be coloured by the presuppositions (and the faith) existing in his own mind. We do not want to play with words. The Christ of faith and the Jesus of history have each a specific signification, and we must not confuse them. But equally we must not speak as though the final results of any Liberal Christian quest are not touched by faith—even if the latter were only grudgingly regarded as such by an opponent.

Having said this, however, we must also point out that for all the objections of the protagonists of the new quest to the possibility of the old quest’s production of any reliable results—its tendency through the influence of *formgeschichte* to dismiss the idea of recovering the *bruta facta* of Jesus’ life and teaching²⁶—it is logically committed to the necessity of discovering at least some of those *bruta facta*, otherwise it cannot fulfil its object of showing the continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The position is as simple as this: no

²⁶ Cf. G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1969, p. 14: “We possess no single word of Jesus and no single story of Jesus, no matter how incontestably genuine they may be, which do not embody at the same time the confession of the believing congregation. This makes the search after the bare facts of history difficult and to a large extent futile”.

Jesus of history—no one from whom to show continuity with the Christ of faith. In other words, the new quest cannot escape from the concern of the old quest to recover, as far as possible, secure knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth. The protagonists of the new quest often seem to have a particular blind spot regarding this fact, but possibly it was some awareness of this that led Professor R. H. Fuller to make a distinction between some of them, calling those who he thinks come nearer to the old quest ideal, “New Questers”, and those who, in his opinion, place more emphasis upon the kerygma, the “Kerygmaticists”.²⁷ Professor Fuller’s distinction is, however, somewhat doubtful in that both Fuchs and Ebeling, whom he puts in the category of “New Questers”, are much given to the use of language that characterises those who are steeped in existentialism, and they both use language in very subtle ways—so that it is very easy to construe what appears to be a liberal statement as something like what Schleiermacher might have said, only to find that it does not mean what one thought it meant.²⁸ And it is here that a major criticism of the new quest must be made. If it is true that the results of the old quest were coloured by the presuppositions that were current in their age, surely it must also be admitted by the protagonists of the new quest that they are donning kerygmatic spectacles in their own search for the historic Jesus, and not only that, but that they have fitted their kerygmatic spectacles with a special existentialist-transforming agent, whereby the Jesus of history “new quest variety” becomes not only a kerygmatic, but also an existentialist figure. Thus the same kind of criticism that its opponents brought against the old quest, viz., that it reflected the presuppositions of the age in which the various attempts to write a life of Christ were made, may be brought against the protagonists of the new quest, with the added criticism that they are also bringing into their interpretation the opinion—for that is what the *kerygma*

²⁷ H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study*, 1963, p. 53.

²⁸ Note Alan Richardson’s pertinent call for a “hermeneut” to interpret the “New Hermeneutic”, *Religion in Contemporary Debate*, 1966, p. 94.

is—of first-century Christians, who, as we all know from historico-literary criticism and *formgeschichte*, re-shaped, and sometimes distorted, what may have been the original teaching of Jesus.

If the original protagonists of the old quest tried to drive a wedge between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith the protagonists of the new quest may be accused of trying to blur the distinction.²⁹ The fact that other than *purely* academic motivation is at work with regard to the new quest may be seen from Professor Käsemann's frank admission in this connection: "I have never been able to think and write simply in a spirit of academic detachment. The only problems which I have felt as a challenge have been those which affected me personally and which had a direct bearing on the ministerial life within the Church".³⁰

As the thinking of the protagonists of the new quest is governed by the existentialist viewpoint, it can therefore be placed in a historical line with that of other viewpoints previously rejected by them, but which show that no one can write without some kind of viewpoint—surely a necessity for every age. However that may be, some of the exponents of the new quest are more than a little "hard" on the more positivistic, and surely more neutral approach of the old quest, and one must feel inclined to question whether the very warm espousal of the "new" method of "existentialist" historiography is the product of an entirely neutral appraisal of historical methods or whether it is the result of the realisation that it lends itself more to proving the case they want to prove! Not everyone who writes history today writes with the theories of Collingwood and Dilthey as controlling forces. Moreover, it will just not do for

²⁹ Indeed it may be claimed that they are bent on pressing the historic Jesus into a kerygmatic mould. "Our task", says Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 21, "is to seek the history *in* the Kerygma of the Gospels and in the history to see the Kerygma".

³⁰ Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 1964, p. 48. (Lecture, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," first given 20th October, 1953).

the category of *heilsgeschichte* to be brought in as a kind of *deus ex machina* when the historian is confronted with a problem like that of the resurrection. Nor will it do to try to represent, as does Alan Richardson, the approach of the *heilsgeschichte* historian as more flexible and neutral than that of the historian whose approach is dominated more by the kinds of criteria that are characteristic of science.³¹

That is not to say that the new method of historiography is without merit. J. M. Robinson is quite right to say that the new method can lead (as does the *kerygma*) to an existential confrontation with Jesus of Nazareth.³² Although he would have expressed it differently, and although there are subtle and significant differences between the old quest and the new quest, this is essentially what the exponent of the old quest was hoping for. If the methods of the new quest can bring about this existential confrontation or challenge, the Liberal Christian of today will welcome it as a most valuable result of the efforts of the leaders of the new quest.

But this leads on to another point: the question of methodology. The new quest is of value because it does raise afresh the whole question of methodology. The leaders of the old quest did most valuable work in devising methods of historical and literary criticism—methods which are still indispensable for any approach to the problem of the historical Jesus. To this the leaders of the new quest have brought further techniques, but what the present writer would like to see is a fresh threshing out of the whole problem of methodology, so that there can be a wider consensus of opinion as to general approach, and a willingness to see that criteria cannot always be made into absolutes.

German scholarship—which the new quest largely represents—seems to be governed too much by a tendency to see things in terms of either/or. Thus, for example, Käsemann, re-

³¹ Alan Richardson, *The Bible in the Age of Science*, 1961, p. 128.

³² J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1959, p. 90.

echoing Hegel, says, "Knowledge proceeds by antitheses"³³ We may rightly expect that genuine logia from Jesus should have an Aramaic form, but can we assume that everything in the Gospels having an Aramaic form is a word of Jesus, and not that of an Aramaic-speaking Christian? So too, while one may rule out certain sayings because they pre-suppose post-resurrection experience, is it fair to assume that Jesus could not have "anticipated" certain events involved in his death and what followed?

German scholarship—and this is not to deny the immense debt under which it has laid the whole realm of theology—seems often to be far too fixed and rigid in its ideas and methods. The present writer cannot help feeling that the Anglo-Saxon tendency to look all round a problem may ultimately prove to be more successful, but certainly clarification with regard to methodology is needed. The point must also be made that the whole question of stance must be made more clear. Bultmann who said that we can know "almost nothing"³⁴ about the historical Jesus yet gave a pretty full portrait of Jesus, and the ordinary reader who compared it with the portrait in Bornkamm might well be excused for wondering what all the excitement was about, and sum up the situation by saying that whereas the one says: "This is all we can know about Jesus", the other producing much the same evidence says: "We know all this".³⁵

This leads on to another point upon which the present writer would insist, viz., that of making a distinction between writing a biography of Jesus, and assembling reliable information about him. There is nothing to stop anyone from exercising his historical imagination for the purpose of writing a biography of Jesus, and Renan's "Fifth Gospel" (knowledge of the times in which Jesus lived) has been considerably increased by the discoveries at Nag Hammadi and at Qumran, but such exercises are largely speculative, and there is all the difference in the world between this kind of exercise and an attempt to

³³ Op. cit., p. 16.

³⁴ R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 1598, p. 14.

³⁵ Bornkamm can, for example, speak of the "primitive tradition of Jesus" as being "brim full of history", op. cit., p. 26.

obtain secure knowledge about Jesus. There are those, like Stephen Neil, who think that the true historian is a very rare phenomenon and that the real history of Jesus has yet to be written.³⁶ There is much to be said for this, provided that the distinction is made between imaginative exercises and the kind of effort which the present writer describes in the previous sentence, and which he is not at all sure that Bishop Neil means.

Nevertheless, the present writer, as a Liberal Christian, would contend that the quest (as distinct from old or new) must be continued, for Christ is central for the Christian Faith, and Christ even as a symbol, containing the highest ideals of Christianity (a possible extreme left-wing Liberal interpretation of Christ as an Ideal or Idea—but one which the present writer does not regard as satisfactory) is not "safe" unless firmly anchored in history—in Jesus of Nazareth. And this last point is all the more important because—and here the present writer would assume the rôle of the prophet in the more popular sense of the word—the insistence upon the supreme importance of the *kerygma*, which dominates so much current theology, is almost bound to lead, when more thought is directed to the problem of the *kerygma*, to a demand for de-kerygmatisation,³⁷ which will prove more far-reaching and radical than Bultmann's attempt at demythologization.

If the results of any quest may seem at times to be meagre, we must remember that more of the essence of a man may be contained in a few words of his than could be provided by a complete "photographic" picture of the external details of his life.

Even to read the synoptic Gospels as they are with a discerning eye is to be confronted by a personality that is still relevant and more than challenging enough for Western man in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

³⁶ Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*, 1966, p. 283 ff.

³⁷ Foretastes of the fulfilment of this may be seen in the work of Fritz Buri, and even in T. G. A. Baker's query in *What is the New Testament?*, 1969, p. 20, as to whether the *kerygma* "on its own . . . would ever convert a fly—even a first-century Palestinian fly—let alone one of the twentieth-century European variety".

UNITARIAN CHRISTOLOGY SINCE THE REFORMATION

BY DUNCAN MCGUFFIE

“UNITARIAN” doctrines of Christ have been many and varied. They have all seen him as subordinate to God the Father and rejected the orthodox view that he is a unique God-man, a person in the Godhead co-equal, co-eternal and of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but whether they have had anything else in common is far from obvious. It is possible, nevertheless, to trace the line of their development from the sixteenth century onwards.

As a result of the Reformation there was an upsurge of unorthodox ideas about Christ. Heresies on the subject were rife among the extreme Protestants known as Anabaptists, many of whom believed, for example, that Christ brought his flesh down with him from heaven. This doctrine of “the celestial flesh of Christ” was among those held by one of the best-known exponents of an unorthodox Christology, the Spaniard Michael Servetus, who was burned at Geneva in 1553. His main theological work, the *Christianismi Restitutio*, was quickly and thoroughly suppressed, but his two earlier treatises on the Trinity had a wider circulation. Northern Italian radicalism, in particular, felt his influence, before in its turn influencing Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), the first Protestant founder of a school of Unitarian thought.

Socinus' opportunity came in Poland, where a largely Anabaptist anti-Trinitarian movement had been expelled from the Reformed Church in 1565 and had set up the Minor Reformed Church. When Socinus settled in Poland in 1580 the Minor Church was in doctrinal chaos; by the end of the decade he had won it over to his views. In 1605 the Racovian Catechism, drawn up by his disciples, gave classic expression to the new system.

The Socinians held that Christ had no existence before his miraculous conception. He was a real but sinless man, who because of his divine origin was the Son of God. After his baptism he was taken up to heaven and filled with the Holy Spirit, which was not a person in the Godhead but God's power in the human heart. Having been instructed in the divine message that, though man by nature is mortal, eternal life awaits those who choose to obey God's commandments, Christ returned to earth and proved the authenticity of his teachings by working miracles. Rather than reconciling God to man, he reconciled man to God by giving us the example of his life and death; and as a reward for his transcendent merit God raised him from the dead, carried him up to heaven and made him ruler over the angels and all the created universe. In this capacity Christ could be called “God” in an inferior sense. As for worshipping him, a distinction was drawn between the prayer of the lips and the homage of the heart. The first was allowable and a matter of individual choice; the second, in the opinion of the earlier Socinians, was essential in order to be a Christian.

By using reason and the Scriptures, the Socinians hoped to restore the simplicity of the Christian faith. Concerning other churches, Socinus wrote in 1584 that he neither condemned nor despised them, but acknowledged all as true churches of Christ.¹ However, although this was an unusually liberal attitude for its time, Socinus's belief in worshipping Christ meant that he denied

¹. Quoted in H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 1951), p. 16.

the name of Christian to the Unitarians of Transylvania. These, following Francis David (1510-1579), held that prayer should be offered to the Father alone. David argued that Jesus' death was contrary to the intention of God, who had meant him to be King of the Jews ; since his resurrection and ascension he had been placed in a state totally unconnected with all that was going on in the world, and hence, being unable to receive worship, he was not a proper object of it. During the seventeenth century the Transylvanian Unitarians gradually accepted the Socinian view of the matter, but they were an isolated and persecuted body whose doctrinal development then came to a halt.

Anti-Trinitarians were expelled from Poland in 1660. The leading Socinian scholars took refuge in Holland, one of whose outstanding figures, the jurist and theologian Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), had been so thoroughly influenced by Socinianism that he was liable to be claimed as a convert to it. New and impressive revised editions of the Racovian Catechism were published in Amsterdam in 1665 and 1680. By well before the middle of the next century, however, having felt the inroads of the widespread "Arianism" which denied that Christ had a human nature and saw him as a pre-existent divine being, the Socinians had been absorbed into Dutch religious liberalism.

In England anti-Trinitarianism was regarded with horror, at least among the educated. Sporadic cases of it were not unknown, and charges of Socinianism were hurled at liberal-minded Anglicans who emphasised the place of reason in religion, but its first important English spokesman was a rationalistic puritan. John Biddle (1616-1662), a schoolmaster of Gloucester and former tutor at Oxford, seems to have become a heretic during the early 1640s. At that time he had read no Socinian books ; his first step was to reject the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, and he later acknowledged that his belief that the Holy Spirit was an angel who had a hand in making man differed from that of the Socinians. As far as Christology was concerned, however, he agreed with them. Jesus has no nature other than

a human one, but because he was in an inferior sense "our God, by reason of his divine sovereignty over us" God the Father should be worshipped through him.² Biddle was acquainted with Socinianism from at least 1648, and his publications included a very free English version of the Racovian Catechism.

After Biddle's death in 1662 his small group of followers continued to meet in London. From 1666 onwards a much respected figure among them was the former Arian preacher John Knowles (c.1625-1677) ; it is not clear whether he retained his earlier views. Two other members were notable: Thomas Firmin, who also worshipped at the Anglican church of St. Mary Woolnoth ; and Henry Hedworth, a gentleman from the North who kept in touch with Socinians and their sympathisers at home and abroad. Biddle's crudely literal belief (similar to John Milton's) that God was "in the heavens", where he felt affections and passions and had a "likeness, similitude, person and shape" remained with Firmin and Hedworth until they became friendly with the Anglican clergyman Stephen Nye (1648 ?-1719).³

Nye's views on Christology show the loosening hold of orthodoxy on the English churches. A gentlemanly, scientific climate of opinion was developing in which the "enthusiasm" of an earlier age was regarded with distaste. Rough approximations to the ancient heresies of Arianism and Sabellianism appeared among the clergy, while the philosopher John Locke believed that, in order to be a Christian, it was enough to have faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Firmin's friend John Tillotson, a leader of the tolerant "latitudinarian" party in the Church of England and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691-4, privately wrote of the so-called Athanasian Creed: "I wish we were well

² John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching The Holy Trinity* (London, 1648), p. 29. The spelling and punctuation of quotations have been amended.

³ John Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism* (London, 1654), pp. 7, 9, 11 ; Stephen Nye, *The Explication of the Articles of the Divine Unity...* (London, 1715), pp. 181-192.

rid of it.”⁴ It was perhaps not surprising, then, that a series of *Unitarian Tracts* should have been published in the 1690s. Firmin was their main promoter, and Nye (under cover of anonymity) their main writer.

The tracts were lively, sarcastic productions which aimed to spread the belief that “the Son is but a man” without luring people out of the established church. They used the word “Unitarian” to describe those who agreed that there was “but one who is God”: thus both Arians and Socinians were Unitarians, “and esteem of one another as Christians and true believers.”⁵ One tract remarked of the Trinity: “A good life is of absolute necessity to salvation; but a right belief in these points that have been always controverted in the churches of God is in no degree necessary.”⁶ Maintaining, nevertheless, that the Trinitarians were mistaken, the tracts insisted that Jesus had only a human nature. The Socinians honoured, “or, if we must use that word, they worship the Lord Christ” only as one highly exalted by God, “to whom God hath given to be head over all things to the church.”⁷

None of the leading “orthodox” rejoinders managed not to be accused of heresy. William Sherlock, for example, was widely thought to have argued that there were three Gods; John Wallis and Robert Smith, on the other hand, laid themselves open to the charge of Sabellianism (the belief that there is only one personality in the Godhead, of which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three aspects). The tracts claimed that Wallis and Smith differed only in words from the Socinians; if it was below Wallis’s dignity to let himself be called a Socinian or a Sabellian, “the Socinians and Sabellians, in honour of him, are content to be called Wallisians.” They granted that there

⁴ Quoted in McLachlan, *op. cit.*, p. 335. The creed was composed between 440 and 520 A.D., rather than by Athanasius.

⁵ *A Brief History of the Unitarians, called also Socinians* (London, 1691), p. 34.

⁶ *The Acts of Great Athanasius* (London, 1690), p. 10.

⁷ *Considerations on the Explications of the Doctrine of the Trinity...* (London, 1693), pp. 32-3.

were senses in which God could be rightly styled the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He was the Son in his capacity as the Redeemer, “because he redeemed us by his Son the Lord Christ”; the Socinians found this “a harsh way of speaking” but would accept it for the sake of peace.⁸ Thus, by putting an heretical interpretation on the Trinity, Nye and his friends remained within the church. Indeed, in his later days Nye took issue with Arianism, approvingly quoted from the Athanasian Creed and presented himself as a Trinitarian in the tradition of St. Augustine.

By that time Deism had emerged as a new kind of unorthodoxy. Nye, Hedworth and the Polish Socinians had thought there was no such thing as natural religion: man lacked any natural knowledge of God or immortality and consequently needed revelation. In contrast, thinkers like Locke and Tillotson had reduced the difference between natural and revealed religion almost to vanishing point. The Deists carried the process further. Reason, unaided by grace, led man to God; the Bible’s prophecies had been disproved; miracles never happened. As disbelievers in the Trinity who saw Jesus as simply a man the Deists were technically Unitarians, and some of them, such as Thomas Chubb (1679-1747), described themselves as Christians. For the Deists who admired him Jesus was a great precursor of eighteenth century morality. Another view came from the anti-Christian German Deist H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768), who argued that he had expected to establish an earthly Messianic kingdom. A century and a half later Albert Schweitzer was to write that Reimarus’s work marked “the first time that a really historical mind, thoroughly conversant with the sources,” had turned to New Testament criticism; but during Reimarus’s lifetime it was only circulated anonymously and in manuscript.⁹

⁸ *Observations on the Four Letters of Dr. John Wallis* (London, 1691), p. 10.

⁹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Third Edition, London, 1963), p. 15. Extracts from Reimarus were published by Lessing in the 1770s.

English Deism was thought to have been crushingly refuted by Joseph Butler, whose *The Analogy of Religion* appeared in 1736. Arianism had established itself among clergymen as the main Christological heresy. Its popularity suggests, perhaps, that for those who have believed that Christ was a God-man it is easier to see him as a God than a man. Arian references to Christ as "this glorious Being" are likely to strike modern readers as carrying odd overtones of fairy stories and science fiction, made all the odder by their context of complacent reasonableness. The most influential of the Arians, however, had a high reputation as a philosopher. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) was a latitudinarian divine of courtly manners who is said to have amused himself at home by jumping over chairs and tables. In *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*, published in 1712, Clarke denied the contention of the original Arians that "there was a time when the Son was not," arguing that Christ had existed with the Father from the beginning. During the Incarnation he had emptied himself of the glory he had with the Father, to whom he was evidently subordinate. Prayers and praises were "made in and by the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of the Son, to the supreme Father and Author of all things."¹⁰

In 1710 Clarke's friend William Whiston, Newton's successor as professor of mathematics at Cambridge, had been banished from the University for his blatant Arianism. A scholarly eccentric who may have been in Goldsmith's mind when he wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Whiston announced at Tunbridge Wells in 1746 that the Millennium would begin in twenty years. The more cautious and conservative Clarke managed to avoid falling into disgrace, although he never obtained a bishopric. (He was orthodox enough to have been approved of by Samuel Johnson, who on his deathbed in 1784 recommended Clarke's

¹⁰ Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1712), pp. 364-5.

sermons because "he is fullest on the propitiatory sacrifice."¹¹ Similar views to his own were starting to spread among the Dissenters. Thomas Emlyn, for example, who became a close friend of Clarke's, had been converted to Arianism by William Sherlock's defence of orthodoxy in 1690. After spending over two years in Irish prisons from 1703 to 1705 for the Arian blasphemies of his *An Humble Inquiry into the Scripture Account of Jesus Christ* he led a small London congregation until about 1711. Like Whiston, he held that Christ was the first and greatest of created beings; but although he described himself as a Unitarian he never dealt with the subject in the pulpit.

In 1719 a major rift in Dissent was hastened by the views of Whiston's friend James Peirce (1673-1726). The suspected Clarkean heresies of Peirce and his fellow minister at Exeter, Joseph Hallet, were the catalyst of a conference in London held at Salters' Hall. There the General Body of London Ministers, comprised of Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists, disagreed over whether or not to declare that Christ "is one God with the Father".¹² Those opposed to such a step carried the day by four votes. As a result the General Body split into two factions: the Subscribers, who had been in favour of the declaration, and the Non-Subscribers who, while for their own part disowning Arianism, had not. The latter group consisted mainly of Presbyterians.

Despite Peirce's discretion about what his views actually were, his unorthodoxy was made clear in his *A Paraphrase and Notes On the Epistle To The Hebrews*. He held that originally Christ had been Israel's guardian angel, of equal but not superior rank to other such guardian angels. Since the Incarnation, however, he had been promoted. "He was annointed with the oil of gladness *above, or more than* his fellows, because he then

¹¹ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (Everyman Edition, London, 2 vols., 1946), II, 608.

¹² Quoted in C. Gordon Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H. L. Short and Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians* (London, 1968), p. 160.

received such an authority, dominion, or kingdom, as was never conferred upon any one of them, he being then made prince, not of a small province, but of the whole world.”¹³

After the Salters' Hall Conference the doctrinal freedom among the Presbyterians attracted the heretically inclined. One of these was Nathaniel Lardner (1684-1768), who, having been an Independent, attached himself to the Presbyterians in 1729. A respected New Testament scholar, Lardner abandoned Arianism in favour of the belief that Jesus was simply a man. His *Letter on the Logos*, written in 1730 and published anonymously in 1759, argued that the Father alone was God. Jesus was the Messiah: “a man, appointed, annointed, beloved, honoured and exalted by God, above all other beings.” He was an exemplar for the human race, whereas man was unable to feel kinship with an Arian Christ who had created the visible world, the angels and the hosts of heaven, and in whose resurrection there was nothing extraordinary.¹⁴ Similar views were held by Lardner's friend Caleb Fleming (1698-1779), who, like Lardner, defended the claims of revealed religion against the Deists whilst agreeing with the pro-Christian Deists that the Christian revelation amounted to a republication of the natural moral law. In his *A Survey of the Search after Souls* in 1758 Fleming took the bold step of denying the resurrection of the body.

The same development from an Arian to a “humanitarian” Christology can be traced among Anglican heretics. In 1753 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Herring, privately expressed approval of Samuel Clarke's Arian revision of the Prayer Book.¹⁵ The extreme latitudinarian, Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761), who died as Bishop of Winchester, was one of the most prominent of the Clarkean Arians. Many of the clergy avoided

¹³ James Peirce, *A Paraphrase And Notes On the Epistles of St. Paul To The Colossians, Philippians, and Hebrews* (London, 1727), p. 23 of “A Paraphrase and Notes On The Epistle To The Hebrews.”

¹⁴ Nathaniel Lardner, *A Letter Written in the Year 1730...* (London, 1759), pp. 37, 39, 43-4.

¹⁵ Quoted in Dennis G. Wigmore-Beddoes, *Yesterday's Radicals* (Cambridge and London, 1971), p. 22.

using the Athanasian Creed and felt uneasy about the Thirty-Nine Articles. (There were at least fourteen different senses in which they tried to justify subscription to them). However, Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), who resigned his living in 1773 and founded Essex Street Chapel in London in the following year, was one of the few who decided to leave the church. Lindsey had arrived at his belief in the simple humanity of Christ without passing through an Arian phase. He had rejected offers of Dissenting pulpits, and at Essex Street used a modified version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, based on Clarke's revision, in the vain hope of stimulating reforms within Anglicanism.

In 1769 Lindsey had made friends with the Dissenting minister, Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), and to a large extent he followed where Priestley led. Lardner's *Letter on the Logos* had converted Priestley from Arianism to being “what is called a Socinian” soon after he had moved to Leeds in 1767.¹⁶ Notable in the scientific field as a chemist and the discoverer of oxygen, Priestley became the first spiritual leader of the Unitarian denomination which emerged from Presbyterianism. He and Lindsey agreed with the Socinians that Jesus had been authorised to reveal to his fellow men that immortality was the reward of righteousness, but differed from them in not being prepared to pray to him. Although Priestley saw himself as preaching the Christianity of the early church, his Jesus had a distinctly eighteenth century air: he was “a man of no enthusiasm or extravagance of temper; who affected no singularity or austerity of behaviour, but was rather of a cheerful and social turn of mind, and who taught nothing but the dictates of sound morality and good sense.” As his business, “like that of any other prophet”, was “nothing more than to deliver a message from God, and to confirm it by miracles, it was not, in reality, of any consequence whatever, *who* or *what* he himself was.”

¹⁶ *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, Written by himself . . .* (London, 1904), p. 38.

He was greater than any other men: but because he was a man he "could not, naturally, be either infallible or impeccable." "It appears to me that we lose more than we gain, by contending for absolute perfection of character in Christ . . . If he was so perfect, it is impossible not to conclude that notwithstanding his appearance 'in fashion as a man', he was, in reality, something more than a man." Speculating a little, Priestley continued: "Christ must also, no doubt, be more perfect *now* than at any time during his ministry here; and, like other good men, must improve in virtue as long as he continues to exist, and still fall infinitely short of that perfection of moral character which belongs to God".¹⁷

Priestley's belief in miracles did not extend to the Virgin Birth: he thought the likelier hypothesis was that Jesus was the child of Joseph and Mary. This soon became accepted among Unitarians, who were so rationalistically inclined that in the 1790s their ministers felt it necessary to launch frequent attacks on the Deist Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. However, in his later days Priestley looked forward to a literal Second Coming. In 1794, before he left England to live in America, he told a friend that in his judgment the great event could not be more than twenty years away. He expected Jesus would literally come in the clouds, raise martyrs and confessors from the dead, restore the Jews to their own country and "govern the world for a thousand prophetic years of peace and prosperity, virtue and happiness."¹⁸ Hopes like these were also expressed by the Unitarian ex-Anglican Edward Evanson, but they failed to appeal to Unitarians in general.

¹⁷ Joseph Priestley, *Theological and Miscellaneous Works*, Ed. John Towil Rutt (London, 25 vols., 1817-32), VII, 213, 175, 347, 356, 357.

¹⁸ Thomas Belsham, *A Calm Inquiry Into The Scripture Doctrine Concerning The Person Of Christ* (London, 1811), p. 319. Priestley conjectured that every prophetic day of the Millennium represented a natural year. See also Joseph Priestley, *Notes on All The Books of Scripture* (Northumberland, Pennsylvania, 4 vols., 1804), IV, 648-657.

Although personally very tolerant, Priestley inaugurated a period in which the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ was preached with great aggression; Arianism declined among Dissenters as a result. After Priestley's departure for America his mantle fell on Thomas Belsham (1750-1829). A lesser man than Priestley, Belsham had his feet more firmly on the ground. He defended the Priestleyan view that "Jesus of Nazareth was a man constituted in all respects like other man, subject to the same infirmities, the same ignorance, prejudice and frailties." Jesus's public moral character, as recorded by the evangelists, was "pure and unimpeachable in every particular", although whether this should suggest that "through the whole course of his private life he was completely exempt from all the errors and failings of human nature, is a question of no great intrinsic moment, and concerning which we have no sufficient data to lead to a satisfactory conclusion." He died simply "as a martyr to the faith, and as a necessary preliminary to the resurrection"; by the resurrection "he not only confirmed the truth and divinity of his mission, but exhibited in his own person a pattern and a pledge of a resurrection to immortal life."¹⁹ Belsham was ready to welcome German higher criticism of the Bible. He rejected the creation story in Genesis as irreconcilable with science, and believed that, although the Gospels had been written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they had been corrupted by inserted narratives.

Arianism survived (especially in Ireland) until well on into the nineteenth century, but the Unitarianism of Belsham and Priestley was the dominant variety until the 1840s. It was allied to a deterministic and materialistic world-view inherited from the eighteenth century philosopher David Hartley (1705-1757), and was open to the charge of being dry and unimaginative. New inspiration came from the United States, where by 1825 a Unitarian denomination had emerged from Congregationalism. Among those who wished it well was the former President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), an old-fashioned Deist

¹⁹ Belsham, *op. cit.*, pp. 447, 190, 450.

in whose opinion Jesus “fell an early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne” before “the course of his preaching . . . presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals.”²⁰ But the leading Unitarian was an Arian, William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), whose preaching was marked by a tone of even-tempered Romanticism. To some extent Channing’s Christology confirmed the Socinian criticism that Arianism had the effect of rendering Jesus non-human rather than superhuman. Channing wrote, for example, that in order that people should understand Christ’s virtues and his precepts he appeared in the form of the lowliest man, “divested of everything that might overpower the senses” so that “men should be encouraged to approach him nearly . . . To this end, I conceive, the miracles of Jesus were studiously performed in the most unostentatious way.”²¹ This sort of language recalls the present-day folk belief that Jesus might have been a visitor from Outer Space. However, although Channing accepted Christ’s pre-existence, his conviction that “All minds are of one family” enabled him to deny that Jesus was “an august stranger, belonging to an entirely different class of existence from myself”. Indeed, he objected to orthodoxy that there was “not a more effectual method of hiding Jesus from us, of keeping us strangers to him,” than inculcating the doctrine that he was God himself.²² On the other hand, Channing could write: “With Dr. Priestley, a good and great man . . . I have less sympathy than with many of the orthodox.”²³ Not only did he emphasise Christ’s “spotless purity”, but he attacked Priestley’s distinction between what Christ was and what he revealed. Christianity could not be known without Christ: it was “his conversation, his character, his history, his life, his death, his resurrection. He pervades it throughout. In

²⁰ Quoted in Henry Wilder Foote, *The Religion of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston, Mass., 1960), p. 55.

²¹ W. E. Channing, *The Complete Works* . . . (London, 1884), p. 40.

²² W. E. Channing, *The Works* . . . (Boston, 1875), pp. 313, 315, 319.

²³ Quoted in James Martineau, *Essays, Reviews and Addresses* (London, 4 vols., 1890-91), I, 119.

loving him, we love his religion”. “Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father”; he was “the brightest image of God”. It was “to make us his children in the highest sense of that word, to make us more and more the partakers of his own nature, not to multiply slaves,” that God had revealed himself in Christ. But “this purpose has been more than overlooked. It has been reversed. The very religion given to exalt human nature has been used to make it abject.”²⁴

Channing’s Christ resembled Priestley’s in being a man of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. He was born a Jew, “and yet we find him escaping every influence of education and society.” “The truth is that, remarkable as was the character of Jesus, it was distinguished by nothing more than by calmness and self-possession . . . How calm was his piety! Point me, if you can, to one vehement, passionate expression of his religious feelings.” And with obvious and perhaps rather disquieting sincerity Channing said that, when he read the Gospels, he had “a feeling of the reality of Christ’s character which I cannot express.”²⁵

Channing was widely respected. Samuel Coleridge, who in his younger days as a Unitarian lay preacher had incongruously combined high achievement as a Romantic poet with a great admiration for Priestley, had turned harshly against Priestleyan Unitarianism and become a liberal Anglican sage; but he wrote of Channing: “I feel convinced that the few differences in opinion between Mr Channing and myself, not only are, but would by him be found to be apparent, not real—the same truth seen in different relations.”²⁶ Coleridge himself was among the men who influenced Channing’s one-time admirer Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who had already left the active ministry when in 1838 he gave an Address at the Unitarian-controlled Harvard Divinity School which caused a Unitarian

²⁴ Channing, *Works*, pp. 318, 323, 248, 395, 249, 253.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 306, 305.

²⁶ Quoted in Martineau, *Essays*, I, 119.

furore. Channing, while still believing in miracles, had said that "Christians have yet to learn that inspiration, and miracles, and outward dignities are nothing compared with the soul." Emerson (for whom the remedy for empty formalism in churches was "first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul") went further: "the word Miracle, as pronounced by the Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster . . . To aim to convert a man by miracles, is a profanation of the soul." For Channing, the "great principle" on which Christ's powers of sympathy were founded "was his conviction of the greatness of the human soul." Emerson thought the same (Christ "saw with open eye the mystery of the soul . . . Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man"), but again he went further. "The true Christianity" was "a faith like Christ's in the infinitude of man"; therefore it was necessary "to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil . . . Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity." Emerson linked Christianity with Stoicism: society needed "nothing so much as a stern, high, stoical, Christian discipline, to make it know itself and the divinity that speaks through it."²⁷ Moreover, although he began the Address with a glitteringly artificial evocation of nature, it was not at all clear that he worshipped a personal God.

For many Unitarians it was scandalous enough that Emerson should have denied the evidential value of miracles, let alone implied that in order to be a Christian it was necessary to dispense with Christ. Emerson himself kept silent in the uproar; it was not in his style to engage in debate, and his livelihood, after all, no longer depended on Unitarianism. A different fate awaited his admirer Theodore Parker (1818-1860), whose sharp tongue and theological and political radicalism made him an

²⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Works* . . . (London, 6 vols., 1884), I, 122, 105, 107, 104-5, 117, 118, 115. The quotations from Channing are from his *Works*, pp. 321, 309.

outcast among most of his fellow ministers. Parker became, nonetheless, an influential figure in Boston and beyond. (His faith in "direct self-government, over all the people, by all the people, for all the people" was echoed by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address). Convinced that man had intuitive knowledge of God, of a moral law and of immortality, he offered a form of self-reliant theism as the true religion of Jesus. In 1845 he said of the virgin birth, the miracles, the resurrection and the assumption: "Believe men of these things as they will. To me they are not truth and fact—but mythic, symbols and poetry; the Psalm of praise with which the world's rude heart extols and magnifies its King." Jesus was "the greatest person of the ages; the proudest achievement of the human race—he taught the Absolute Religion—Love to God and Man." With a touch of ostentation in his vehement generosity Parker proclaimed: "I do not know that he did not teach some errors, also, along with it. I care not if he did. It is by his truths that I know him . . ." "That God has yet greater men in store I doubt not; to say this is not to detract from the mystic character of Christ, but to affirm the omnipotence of God."²⁸ In the eyes of Unitarian orthodoxy all this amounted to "infidelity" and "Deism": true Christianity required a miraculously guaranteed revelation of God through Christ. As for Trinitarian orthodoxy, when Parker's health broke in 1859 daily prayers were offered that he might be silenced.

Within English Unitarianism the influence of Channing helped to stimulate a process which bore some resemblances to the American one. Here the leading figure was James Martineau (1805-1900), who was probably the greatest theologian that Unitarianism has ever produced. Martineau entered the ministry in 1828. Originally he was a Priestleyan, and in 1836 he was still denying that disbelievers in miracles could be called Christians; but his mature Christology was inspired by Channing. He was far from accepting Channing's Arianism

²⁸ Theodore Parker, *The Relation of Jesus to his Age and the Ages* (Boston, 1845), pp. 12, 14, 12.

(indeed, his friend J. H. Thom actually abandoned Arianism as one of the liberating effects of reading Channing); he thought that “the New-England prophet . . . brought a new language” to Unitarian theology because he emphasised “*The greatness of human capacity*, not so much for intellectual training, as for voluntary righteousness, for victory over temptation, for resemblance to God”. For Martineau as for Channing, Christ’s nature was a revelation of God’s nature, “performing the function of awakener to our sleeping perceptions of the highest good.”²⁹ It was “an idle question for sceptical criticism to raise, whether the religion of Christ comprised in its teachings any ethical element absolutely new. If genius had conceived it all before, life had not produced it till now.”³⁰ “The exhibition of Christ as (God’s) Moral Image has maintained in the souls of men a common spiritual type . . . to merge all minds into one family”. God dwelt perennially in man and the universe. Expressing a long-held belief, Martineau wrote in 1861: “The Incarnation is true, not of Christ exclusively, but of Man universally, and God everlastingly.”³¹

On this view, the main evidence for Christianity lay in the soul. Hence Martineau attached decreasing importance to miracles, until he finally stopped believing in them altogether. Furthermore, accepting as he did a humanitarian rather than an Arian Christology he was able to admit that Jesus was fallible. But he took issue with Theodore Parker (whom he admired) for making the moral perfection of Jesus “not an essential, but a subsidiary, support to Christianity . . . No revelation of duty is possible except through the Conscience; and Conscience cannot be effectually reached but by the presence of a holier life and a higher spirit.”³²

²⁹ Martineau, *Essays*, IV, 576; I, 116.

³⁰ James Martineau, *Studies of Christianity* (London, 1858), p. 302.

³¹ Martineau, *Essays*, III, 51; II, 443.

³² *Ibid.*, I, 183.

Holding such views as these, Martineau might have been expected to have seen without difficulty that Jesus was a nineteenth century liberal; but in fact his ideas about the historical Jesus were sufficiently untypical of his time to be worth tracing in some detail. In 1840, listing the points in D. F. Strauss’s *Leben Jesu* which he had been delighted to find there because he had long been convinced of their truth, he included the theory that Jesus believed in “a personal return to reign”. Two years later he wrote in a letter: “It is, in my opinion, quite clear that Jesus largely partook of the Messianic notions of his country, and applied them to himself—that he expected to return in person to this world during that generation and close the system of human things, and establish in its place a terrestrial theocracy.”³³ Despite Martineau’s claim that this was “quite clear” to him it was actually a question on which he wavered for many years. In 1847, for instance, he wrote to his friend F. W. Newman that he had “long been convinced” that Jesus’s expectations of a speedy Second Coming “must be taken literally; and, if truly reported (which we have no right, perhaps, to question), must be dealt with as mistakes . . . I grant you that, if such claims and promises were to be put forth by anyone in Europe now, they would prove him to be too much tinctured with fanaticism to be safely followed.” Things were different in first century Palestine, with its “universal prevalence of theocratical ideas and Messianic anticipation”. Nevertheless, by the end of the paragraph Martineau was finding it “very doubtful whether Jesus really identified himself with the Messiah at all.”³⁴

In 1851 he still thought that Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah. However, it was surely no bad thing “if for Messiah’s tame millenium we have the grand and struggling life of Christendom . . . There is no reason for the common assump-

³³ J. Estlin Carpenter, *James Martineau* (London, 1905), pp. 231-2, 197.

³⁴ James Drummond and C. B. Upton, *The Life and Letters of James Martineau* (London, 2 vols., 1902), I, 139-40.

tion that a religion must be purest in its infancy.”³⁵ Writing on “The Ethics of Christendom” in 1852, Martineau insisted that the principle of not resisting evil “meant no more in the early Church than that the disciples were not to anticipate the hour, fast approaching, of Messiah’s descent to claim his throne . . . ‘My kingdom’, said Jesus, ‘is not of this world ; else would my servants fight’ ;—an expression which implies that no kingdom of this world can dispense with arms, and that he himself, were he head of a human polity, would not forbid the sword ; but while ‘legions of angels’ stood ready for his word, and only waited till the Scripture was fulfilled and the hour of darkness was passed, to obey the signal of heavenly invasion, the weapon of earthly temper might remain within the sheath.” Martineau therefore condemned the “amiable enthusiasts who propose to conduct the affairs of nations on principles of brotherly love.”³⁶ He argued that, while the values of the early church remained as relevant as ever, their practical consequences must be very different once the expectation of a Second Coming had been given up.

Even by German standards, this was an “advanced” view to take in the 1850s. Within the Church of England, orthodoxy still maintained what Benjamin Jowett called an “abominable system of terrorism which prevents the statement of the plainest facts and makes true theology or theological education impossible”.³⁷ Among Unitarians, Martineau was widely believed to combine an unwholesome sympathy for orthodoxy with a weakness for destructive scholarship. In 1851 *The Inquirer*, which was usually well disposed towards him, gave a hostile review to his sermon “The God of Revelation his own Interpreter.” Claiming that to accept that Jesus was the Messiah was to “set up the chief Judaic error as the chief Christian verity,” Martineau regretted that Christians were taught to call Jesus “our Lord”: like the Apostles’ description of themselves

³⁵ *Studies of Christianity*, p. 296. For his belief in 1851 that Jesus wrongly claimed to be the Messiah, see *Essays*, III, 28.

³⁶ *Studies of Christianity*, pp. 344, 345, 351-2.

³⁷ Quoted in Dennis G. Wignmore-Beddoes, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

as his “slaves” this was an obsolete product of Messianic ideas. To obey God “as slaves, in fear and with an eye upon his power, is, with all our punctuality and anxiety, simply and entirely to disobey him . . . Still less can we be slaves to Christ, who is no Autocrat to us, but our freely followed leader towards God”.³⁸ The Priestleyan *Christian Reformer* tried to refute “this foolish sermon” by pointing out that Locke had proved by reason and the scriptures that it was the primary article of Christianity that Jesus was the Messiah.³⁹ Martineau had given an offence which lasted for years.

At the same time he was fighting on another front. His friend Francis Newman, whose elder brother became Cardinal Newman, had argued against the sinlessness of Christ. Martineau replied that, although Christ was no doubt intrinsically capable of sin, he must be presumed perfect until proved imperfect. However, “That no higher being can ever appear on earth we would by no means venture to affirm.” Admitting that he shared “the dependent temper of those who correct and confirm themselves by reference to the past,” Martineau appealed to “the common consciousness of Christendom” in support of Christ’s greatness.⁴⁰ But in a letter to his friend R. H. Hutton, after mentioning Newman’s reluctance to let a “mediating object of reverence” stand between himself and God, he commented: “I am far from being convinced that this characteristic is not rather a perfection of mind and that the clinging to objects of extreme admiration may not be a weakness. If so, it is a weakness in which, for my own part, I find it indispensable to live”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he showed some restiveness with his “image of extreme admiration.” His dislike of the term “Lord” has already been mentioned ; and he once remarked to a colleague: “If Jesus were here, would you do straight off anything he told you ?”⁴²

³⁸ Martineau, *Essays*, IV, 478-80.

³⁹ Carpenter, *Martineau*, pp. 359, 364.

⁴⁰ Martineau, *Essays*, III, 60 (written in 1853), 37.

⁴¹ Drummond and Upton, *Martineau*, I, 339.

⁴² Carpenter, *Martineau*, p. 588, n.

Jane Welsh Carlyle, then, may have been on the mark when she wrote after hearing Martineau preach that he looked “a picture of conscientious anguish while he was overlaying his Christ with similes and metaphors, that people might not see what a wooden puppet he had made of him to himself.”⁴³ Despite his pronouncement in 1851 that the problem of whether Jesus “was such as the Gospels and Paul represent” was non-existent, his belief in Christ’s sinlessness drove him, with the help of the German Tübingen school of critics, to the final position that “measured by quantity alone, the residuary treasure of the Gospel . . . does not bulk large”.⁴⁴ In 1890 he argued in *The Seat of Authority in Religion* that, while there was “no reason to doubt that Jesus shared, under whatever personal modifications, the Messianic expectations of his contemporaries,” he had never applied them to himself. Armed with the principle that our sense of what was beautiful, deep and true in the Gospels could tell us what he had really been like, Martineau unearthed what proved to be a rather brooding version of gentle Jesus, meek and mild. But this Jesus had the advantage, for Martineau, of being morally pure: his “very susceptibility to possible repentance and consciousness of something short of ‘Good’, rather lifts him for us nearer to the standard of holiness, than detains him in the precincts of sin.”⁴⁵

By 1890 Martineau had long enjoyed a high reputation outside as well as within Unitarianism. In 1886 his denomination had given a respectful hearing to his attempt to find “A Way Out of the Trinitarian Controversy,” in which he had argued that only “the snare of words” prevented the recognition that Unitarians, like other Christians, centred their worship not on the Father of the orthodox creeds, but the Son—God as “Creative Thought, guiding Providence, redeeming grace”.⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁴⁴ Martineau, *Essays*, III, 34; Carpenter, *Martineau*, p. 590.

⁴⁵ James Martineau, *The Seat of Authority in Religion* (London, 1890), pp. 589, 651. See pp. 188-9 for his critical method with the Synoptic Gospels, and Carpenter, *Martineau*, pp. 590-1 for his attitude to John.

⁴⁶ Martineau, *Essays*, II, pp. 525-38.

However, his rejection of the Messianic claims met with widespread disagreement. Others were less alive than he to the need to take this step in order to save the liberal, sinless Jesus. It is not surprising, of course, that Martineau’s preconceptions should have gained the upper hand (the sweetly reasonable Jesus of Matthew Arnold, after all, was another “wooden puppet”); it is more remarkable that, even before reading Strauss, he should have thought that Jesus was mistaken about his Messiahship.

In sharp contrast to Martineau’s were the views of his friend Francis Newman (1805-1897). For most of his professional life Newman was Professor of Latin at University College, London, where one of his achievements was to produce a Latin translation of “Hiawatha”. Despite a simplicity of manner which charmed his friends he was no simpleton: his distinction between “once-born” characters, knowing little of sin in God’s “beautiful and harmonious world”, and the more complex “twice-born,” whose spiritual life is attained through despair, was adopted by William James in his classic study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Newman had a long association with Unitarianism, although he only joined the denomination in 1876. (His brother wrote: “Is this an improvement? Perhaps, but he does not believe in Revelation.”)⁴⁷ His intuition-based theism was very similar to Martineau’s. On the subject of Jesus, however, he wrote in 1881: “To correct, cancel or re-write documents of the past until a character depicted in them is made ideally perfect according to our notion of perfection, certainly cannot aid or exalt our morality: what historian of repute will admit that it can aid us to historic truth?” The plain fact was “that the character of Jesus, *as actually depicted in the gospels*, abounds with manifest and grievous blots.” He was “a religious mendicant” who reasoned evasively, scolded impotently and escaped from the scene of life furtively. Not only was he not perfect, but he was “one whose good behaviour was lower than the average,” as he made clear when “he uttered condem-

⁴⁷ Quoted in S. R. D. Middleton, *Newman and Bloxam* (London, 1947), p. 205.

nations which nothing could justify but a divine insight into men's hearts . . . It would be utterly wrong for one of us to fling at men in authority and clergymen, without proof, without ceremony, and without discrimination, such epithets as fools and blind, hypocrites, children of hell, vipers, whited sepulchres and so on . . . it would shock them all". It was shocking, too, that "in Luke even a harlot's affection for him is avowed to earn forgiveness for her sins." Jesus brought his crucifixion on himself "by refusing to explain an ambiguous phrase and ambiguous acts." Newman found it clear that "Paul's morality rose *high above* that attributed by Church tradition to Jesus". Fortunately, "Christianity will remain without Christ".⁴⁸

Whatever else can be said about Newman's Christ, he has the advantage over Martineau's of being more visible in the Gospels. Newman faced up to the fact that, by the standards of nineteenth century liberal Christianity, the Gospels do indeed present us with "one whose good behaviour was below the average". However, he was an extreme case. When he joined the Unitarians in 1876 he wrote "I have not changed towards them; they have moved towards me,"⁴⁹ and he became a Vice-President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1879; but in 1881 an article in *The Inquirer*, dealing amicably with another critic of Jesus, Charles Voysey, said that although Unitarians readily admitted that Jesus "was not infallible, that he might have made mistakes, might have sometimes said unwise things, we still claim for him the character of a true and noble religious reformer."⁵⁰ Unitarianism finally ceased to attract Newman; but when he died in 1897 an appreciative *Inquirer* editorial remarked of his controversy with Martineau about Jesus: "It is singular how modern the discussion reads that is carried on in those pages."⁵¹ In 1876 Martineau had written

⁴⁸ Francis W. Newman, *What Is Christianity Without Christ?* (London, 1881), pp. 18, 9, 12, 15, 21, 23.

⁴⁹ Quoted in William Robbins, *The Newman Brothers* (London, 1966), p. 164.

⁵⁰ *The Inquirer*, 29th October, 1881.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9th October, 1897.

despondently: "Religion, once drifting away from the Personality of God and resolved into a Moral Idealism (and this is the growing tendency with our young men), loses all that is distinctive and melts into general culture . . . we are falling, I fear, into far more serious errors than those which other churches still retain."⁵² In America, it was being argued that in the interests of "moving on" Unitarianism should establish itself on an ethical rather than a theistic basis. To this the Rev. Jabez T. Sunderland replied in 1886: "a religious body may move on for a time toward the edge of religion—nearer and nearer to the edge—but what if it moves off?"⁵³

When Martineau died in 1900 *The Inquirer* was bordered in black. In the opening years of the new century his disciple James Drummond magisterially expounded a Christology much like his. Jesus remained the pre-eminent Son of God "whatever blots some may suppose they detect in his character, whatever limitations there undoubtedly are in his teaching".⁵⁴ Unlike Martineau, Drummond was ready to call Jesus Lord and Saviour (Martineau had rejected "Saviour" as Messianic); he also believed that Jesus "thought of himself, in his own spiritual sense, as the Messiah". However, "Nothing could have been more repugnant to his whole tone of thought than the assumption of the power and trappings of royalty".⁵⁵ But in 1909, a year after Drummond had published this, the Congregational minister K. C. Anderson was proclaiming "The Collapse of Liberal Christianity": "For some decades now, liberal theology has been engaged in the search for the historical Jesus, and the conviction is being slowly forced on all candid inquirers that very little can be known of Him."⁵⁶ In the

⁵² Drummond and Upton, *Martineau*, II, 32.

⁵³ Quoted in David B. Parke (Ed.), *The Epic of Unitarianism* (Boston, 1957), pp. 128-9.

⁵⁴ James Drummond, *Some Thoughts On Christology* (London, 1902), p. 55.

⁵⁵ James Drummond, *Studies in Christian Doctrine* (London, 1908), p. 364.

⁵⁶ *The Hibbert Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, p. 301.

same year *The Hibbert Journal* produced a supplement entitled *Jesus Or Christ?* a collection of essays, chosen to include a large variety of Christian opinion, provoked by another Congregationalist who had persisted in detecting blots on Jesus. A contribution from Drummond waved aside these claims, but had no difficulty in detecting blots on such other candidates for human admiration as Plato and the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (the latter of whom told us “not to be too hard upon men who are unchaste before marriage, thus containing in advance all the horrors of the white slave-trade.”)⁵⁷ The other Unitarian contributor, Joseph Estlin Carpenter, maintained that “With force enough in his faith and elevation enough in his ideals to inspire the best thought of the world and create the noblest character ever since, Jesus remains for us a man of his country, race and time.”⁵⁸

Jesus Or Christ? was referred to the next year in the preface to the English translation of Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Notoriously, Schweitzer’s theory that Jesus’ preaching was dominated by a mistaken belief that God was about to break into human affairs to establish him at the head of a supernatural Messianic kingdom gave a damaging blow to liberal theology. Unitarian reactions varied. Schweitzer was conspicuous by his absence from S. H. Mellone’s *The New Testament and Modern Life*, which appeared in 1921; but Mellone conceded, in contrast to his teacher Drummond, that Jesus’ teaching contained the “fundamental thought of the present world-order quickly passing away and giving place to a coming Kingdom of God on earth, to be inaugurated by his own return in power and glory.”⁵⁹ In 1945 the impact of Schweitzer and the subsequent form-critics was acknowledged in the Unitarian theological report *A Free Religious Faith*. However, the report’s ideas about Jesus resembled Martineau’s in

⁵⁷ *Jesus Or Christ?* (the Hibbert Journal Supplement for 1909), p. 203.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-5.

⁵⁹ Sidney Herbert Mellone, *The New Testament and Modern Life* (London, 1921), p. 65.

1845. “Jesus may have conceived of himself as the promised Messiah,” and it “may well be true that the expectation of the imminent end coloured the moral teaching which Jesus enunciated, but did not condition its essential outlines.” The admission that he “cannot have been unfailingly ‘sinless’ throughout his whole life” is made in rather more guarded tones than Belsham’s verdict in 1811 that Jesus was “subject to the same infirmities, the same ignorance, prejudice and frailties” as other men. Finally, “the sublime teacher of Nazareth” is presented, like the Buddha and Socrates, as one of the “light-bringers”: “he saw the image of God in every human face, and inspired with new hope even the most sinful and friendless in his own age”.⁶⁰

Unlike its American counterpart, English Unitarianism has remained predominantly Christian and theistic. Unitarian scholars—and there are considerably less of them than there used to be—still tend to be optimistic about the chances of recovering a “liberal” Jesus from the New Testament. At the time of writing (September, 1972) the most recent denominational discussion about Jesus was occasioned by two articles in *The Inquirer* in which the protagonists took up attitudes very similar to those of Newman and Martineau in 1851. Jesus’ critic (this time a humanist) argued that “If Jesus taught all the things attributed to him in the New Testament, then he must have been an extremely odd character indeed”, while his defender appealed, as Martineau had done, to the common consciousness of Christendom.⁶¹

It is not necessary to hold a doctrinaire belief in “moving on” in order to see something unsatisfactory about this situation. There are some Unitarians, of course, who feel it would

⁶⁰ Raymond V. Holt (Ed.), *A Free Religious Faith* (London, 1945), pp. 157, 166, 169, 171.

⁶¹ “Beyond Jesus,” by Derek Stirman, and “The Continuing Quest,” by John Midgley, in *The Inquirer*, 20th September, 1969. See Kenneth Twinn (Ed.), *Essays In Unitarian Theology* (London, 1959), for mid-century attitudes by Christian Unitarians.

be a step in the right direction if their brethren stopped being obsessed with Jesus. Christian Unitarians are bound to take a different view. Traditionalists as they are, it would be surprising if they ignored the Christology of their predecessors: often its very strangeness throws enduring Unitarian traits into sharper relief. But their main difficulty is clear enough. Until the nineteenth century, in common with other Christians, Unitarians unwittingly made Jesus in their own image. As the scholarly problems grew, so did a crisis of confidence from which Christian Unitarians are still suffering. If they are ever to recover from it, they stand badly in need of a new Christology.

FURTHER READING

The history of Unitarian Christology is inseparable from the history of Unitarianism, the best study of which is Earl Morse Wilbur's two-volume *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents* and *In Transylvania, England and America* (first published by the Harvard University Press in 1945 and 1952 respectively). For an interesting selection of documents, see David B. Parke (Ed.), *The Epic of Unitarianism*, available in paperback from the Beacon Press, Boston. More detailed studies of successive stages of development include: George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (London, 1962); H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, 1951); C. Gordon Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H. L. Short and Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians* (London, 1968); and Dennis G. Wigmore-Beddoes, *Yesterday's Radicals* (Cambridge and London, 1971). For general readers wishing to consult original material for themselves there are, in addition to David Parke's anthology, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing—Emerson—Parker* (Beacon paperback, 1961), introduced by Conrad Wright; and Alfred Hall's *James Martineau: Selections*, published by The Lindsey Press.

THE LIFE "IN CHRIST"

BY DAVID C. DOEL

THE Life "in Christ" is characterised and recognised by that "glorious liberty" which belongs to the children of God. The expression captures that existential freedom which is the opposite of all that we have come to understand by the terms "estrangement," "alienation," "encapsulation" and "existential death". To be "in Christ" is to enjoy "existential life" and that which prises us from our existential prison, which sets us free for existential life, is the Truth. "Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free."

The Truth which makes us free is not scientific or empirical truth in the ordinary sense, but existential truth; i.e., the truth about the nature of *our* existence and the truth about the nature of existence *itself*. The Truth which makes us free is existential truth and it is in particular that existential truth which we have forgotten or denied.

Comment is required on the term "existential". Firstly, we take the word "existence" and we spell it like the Germans, with a "z"—"existenz"—to allow that whilst we *are* talking about existence, we are talking also, at least some of the time, about existence in a way in which ordinarily we do not.

For example, a ten penny piece has various forms of existenz. It exists as a small, silver, round, flat, metal object, with engraving upon it. That is one existenz. It exists also as a coin, as a symbol of value. That is another existenz. It exists yet again as a mass of atoms whirling at a particular speed, a speed different from that of the table on which it is placed. That is another existenz. It exists as a sentimental souvenir of a first meeting between a man and a woman. That is another existenz. It exists as a ten penny piece that was once a florin—and so on.

Let us assume our ten penny piece is a self-reflecting coin, with an ability to communicate. Like human beings there may well be existenz of which it is unconscious, to which it will not admit ; i.e., towards which it practised “bad faith”. “I am not and never have been a florin,” says the coin. “I am not small and object to that derogatory adjective. I am much larger than a half penny, a penny or even a five penny piece. Moreover, I have no knowledge whatever of being a souvenir. And as to being a mass of swirling atoms, why, that’s absurd—anyone can see I’m quite solid”.

Like this poor coin, human beings recognise some existenzen and deny or are ignorant (ignore-ant, cf. *avidya*) of others. The Truth which completes us, makes us “whole” and which liberates and illuminates us, is the Truth about the “existenz” that we deny. The most fundamental existenz which human beings deny, or of which they are unconscious, or towards which they practise “bad faith” is that of encapsulation or existential death ; what the church called a condition of Sin, of deordination of soul. Indeed, it is the very act of denying particular existenz which divides us off from areas of ourselves and which impoverishes our spiritual and mental life. The contemplative traditions of the great world religions agree with the Vedanta and with modern depth psychology, that man’s basic problem is to discover who he is ; that is to discover, recognise and accept the existenz of which he has been unaware or which he has denied.

The act of denying my own existenz grows out of the habit, inculcated by the conformative influences of society, of discriminating and judging and deciding between good and evil and right and wrong. “Judge not that ye be not judged. For with the judgment that ye judge, so shall ye be judged”. Chuang Tzu anticipated so many contemplative theologians when he asserted that he who distinguishes between good and evil does not know what religion is about.

The ten penny piece judges that it is bad, evil to be small, a mere souvenir, lacking in solidity or a florin. He therefore tries to be what he is not and denies that which he is. He discriminates against himself and thus reduces himself. He has lost that innocence which knows that to the pure all things are pure. He is a divided, narrowed and “encapsulated” creature; encapsulated by his own acts of discrimination, into which he has been misdirected by that Spirit of corrupting Nature, which the mediaevals recognised as a Devil (perhaps derived from the Sanskrit root “to divide”).

Evil is division. When human beings are divided their libido is exhausted in maintaining the divisions, which become “legion”. A state of psychic imbalance is produced, which requires ever more artifice, intellectual gymnastics, rationalisations and defence mechanisms to protect the ego system against the implosion of the “other”—i.e., the existenz alien to the impoverished “self” with which the ego has identified and to which it clings fearfully and tenaciously.

A human being is a more complicated creature than a ten penny piece. He has many more forms of existenz. There is the existenz of his body as it appears to his friends ; the existenz of his body as it appears to the surgeon. There is the existenz he holds as carpenter, teacher, lawyer ; his existenz as father, husband, lover. There is his existenz as dishonest onanist, frequenter of lavatories or brothels. There is his existenz as life and soul of the party. There is his existenz as man of tragedy. There is his existenz as baby, child and adult. There is his existenz as God ; his existenz as individual existence and

his existenz as universal existence. A man has all these existenzen at the same time. Man is, as Sartre pointed out, the creature whose past and potential future are always present. This is because a man's past existenz and his potential existenz exist as psychic realities and not as mere abstractions.

The term "existential", then, refers to modes of being, existenz, of which I may be aware or unaware. To speak of existential death is to speak, therefore, of a mode of existence which is death-like and so on. Whilst a man laughs uproariously with his friends he is also, often unknown either to them or himself, in great agony—the agony of daily crucifixion. He is a Pagliacci who has forgotten (*avidya*) or has "bad faith" towards his inner malaise. It was Kierkegaard, in his *Sickness unto Death*, who pointed out that the most desperate man is the man who is unaware of his despair. The ascent to heaven is always preceded by the existenz of the descent into hell, into that dark existenz of which I have been unaware and from which I have fled into activity and delusion. The existenz of the Cross and the Tomb always stand in the Way of Resurrection. The existenz of *nigredo* bars the path to union.

A man becomes whole, and therefore free, as he recognises and accepts the physical existenz he has denied or towards which he has had the amnesia of bad faith. *Being* "in Christ" is to be lived by my most profound existenz, that existenz represented by the God or Christ image at the *fundus* of my soul (the Id or Potentia or Core of post-Freudian depth psychology). The journey the Ego takes towards wholeness is didactic and dialectic; it is, as Jung said, the product of a conversation with my own depths. After all, what is a locution, but a conversation with the depths of my own soul?

We speak ordinarily of a man talking with himself, when he is attempting to be objective to his own thoughts and we are familiar, moreover, with the problem of multiple personality in which different psychical existence, different areas of the psyche, take on themselves personae, appear *per speciem* (in image form) in dream or vision, or possess the body and the surface

ego system. A man then talks to himself as he talks to another; one existenz addresses another existenz. He discovers "alien" persons within himself. The God or Christ image, which stands for all that a man potentially has it in him to become, likewise may take image form and become a "person" with whom he may converse. There appears an I and a Thou, which are part of a psychic whole; a whole which is fragmented into various disparate and dissociated existenzen.

A man may thus discover that he is that Thou—*Tat Twam Asi*. In Hindu thought this notion of the divided psychic poles is expressed in the concepts of the *jivatman*, the surface person, surrendering to the *paratman*, the deep self, and uniting (*yoga*) with it and recognising that this inner self is, in fact, *Brahma*.

The most profound self-discovery is the discovery that I am God and that my self-consciousness may include Him. It then becomes nonsense to have my life governed by the superficial ego I have known and I "let go" in order that my life may be lived. God lives through me. I become the vehicle of His grace. As Paul put it, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who liveth in me". This is what it means to be "in Christ".

The spiritual power and serenity and joy which derive from "letting go" the attempt at being what I am not, belong to that unity of person, that psychic wholeness and singleness, which the disciples witnessed in Jesus of Nazareth and which Paul experienced in himself after the shattering dissolution of that self that was Saul on the Road to Damascus.

And this, too, is what it means to be "in Christ"—to be undivided. To reject no existenz, but to reclaim all that within me which has been lost (like that reclamation work which Freud suggested was to be compared with the draining of the Zuyder Zee); to find my "self" by losing my "self". "But if a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it giveth forth fruit a hundredfold".

To be "in Christ" is to lose the centre of judgment and discrimination which marks me out as this particular "self", so that that self (Saul) no longer directs and rules and "lives" my

life, but I find instead that my life is lived ; that I am curiously now part of a process which inexorably takes me with it and which with the same inexorability leads to the Cross and the Tomb and the Resurrection. For the Cross is nothing other than the pain and isolation and rejection, which belong to my encapsulated and lost existenz, the bearing of which means death to the self I have known, a recognition of my encapsulated (entombed) condition and a resurrection of My self united with That self ; in which resurrection lies my victory over my existential death. In losing my self I have found my self. It is always, as Tillich had it, in our facing the tension between the existenz we recognise and the existenz that we ignore or avoid that that growth takes place. Man is called to endure that terrible tension and the "aweful" conflict it involves. In that conflict he is helpless, since it is only the angels who have the power to smash the prison, as they did for Peter.

Van Gogh, in a letter to his brother, Theo, described the encapsulating prison which prevents us from *being* "in Christ":

"And circumstances often prevent men from doing things, prisoners in I do not know what horrible, horrible, most horrible cage . . . One cannot always tell what it is that keeps us shut in, confines us, seems to bury us ; nevertheless, one feels certain barriers, certain gates, certain walls. Is all this imagination, fantasy ? I don't think so. And one asks, 'My God! is it for long, is it forever, is it for all eternity ?'

"Do you know what frees one from this captivity ? It is every deep, serious affection. Being friends, being brothers, love, that is what opens the prison by supreme power, by some magic force. Without this one remains in prison".

Only love can awaken love and love cannot exist where there are barriers. Love hates the inhibition of divisions. Love cannot abide the hypocrisy of existential ignore-ance. Love requires wholeness ; it requires the shedding of all that bars us from that intimacy which alienation makes impossible. The Gentiles, said Paul (RSV—Eph. 4: 18), were "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of their

ignore-ance". Denial of our own existenz is that ignore-ance which alienates and which makes impossible the spontaneity, uninhibitedness, directness and openness, which are so characteristic of love. Love requires our recognition of our deep need of love. It is this recognition alone which may melt the ice of the cold world of the ego's prison and let the land be watered with tears that flowers may grow in the ground of the soul.

Alienation, existential death, Sin, is characterised by an impoverished ability to respond to people, to life and to God. The capacity for spontaneous (i.e., non-deliberate) and loving behaviour is inhibited ; "being" is replaced by "doing" ; loving behaviour is replaced by the call to duty. Hyper-activity of mind, what the Hindu calls "*rajas*", restlessness of spirit, provides a barrier between the Ego and its objects. In the exhausting attempt to protect the Ego system against implosion the person is confined in an ever-narrowing prison, losing continually direct awareness of the world and the sense of his own "presence" in the world. His response to people and to things becomes stereotyped ; his efforts at controlling himself and his environment result in mental cramp. His primary approach to the world has become, in Buber's terms, an "I-It" relationship rather than "I-Thou".

To be "in Christ" is to have an "I-Thou" relationship with the world. Estrangement, Sin, involves an "I-It" relationship. The person trapped in an "I-It" situation lives in a grey, cardboard world, which has become so familiar to him and his knowledge of any other "world" so remote, that he accepts his experience as "normal" and "healthy". To the extent that his vision corresponds to that of the majority of people about him, he will be correct in considering himself "normal", but misled into believing his vision is "healthy".

Should his vision begin to change ; should the world of the senses begin to press forcefully upon him ; should its "realness" and "nearness" begin to "approach" him, he will be inclined to believe that he is in danger of going out of his mind. And

in this belief he will also be correct. He is at the point where he may step out of the excessively narrow and busy mental world to which he is used into a larger and more serene mental world, which is quite foreign to him. He will be in the position of the man who ventured towards the daylight in the parable of the Cave in the *Republic* of Plato.

All men become existentially bound. "The bondage of the will," wrote Tillich, "is a universal fact. It is the inability of man to break through his estrangement."¹ To smash the prison-house and exorcise the shades that have haunted the growing boy is the role of all charismatic and maieutic personalities. The raising of the dead is the function not only of prophets, but also of psychotherapists and ministers of religion and all who care for the soul's life. "The greatest good which can be done to any being", wrote Kierkegaard,² "greater than any end to which it can be created, is to make it free".

When Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth he made it plain that this was to be the purpose of *his* ministry. He read from the Isaiah scroll:

"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, to give sight to the blind and to release those who have been crushed" (*Tethrausmenous*).

The Freudians preach the "crushing" of the personality under their term "repression", which is to be understood as a kind of spiritual murder. This "murder" is that existential death to which Roquentin, the hero of Sartre's novel *Nausea*, awakens. His nausea is that hopelessness which is the only source of true hope; that "sickness unto death", which is the only gateway to existential life. He is recognising that life is never better nor worse, it simply *is*. Roquentin is "letting go", without having to *decide* to let go. The vivid awareness of existence, which Sartre describes, is one of the experiences which masters of Zen look for in their pupils. Roquentin had, in their terms, enjoyed *Satori*, illumination; had seen Kensho, glimpsed into his own nature. Roquentin, who all his life had tried to avoid decision-making, woke up to the astonishing para-

For references, see end of this chapter.

dox that we cannot avoid "choosing" and that yet at the same time there is no choice to be made. The human situation is, as Watts points out, "like that of fleas on a hot griddle". None of the alternatives offer a solution, for the flea who falls must jump, and the flea who jumps must fall. Choosing is absurd because there is no choice."⁴

Roquentin is becoming free from the stultifying pattern of his life, utterly futile and fruitless, which has derived ironically just from his attempt to choose the way his life should go; in selecting particular existenz and rejecting others; just from his very desire for freedom, which is seen by him as freedom from involvement—*dégagement*. Uninvolvement, however, is necessarily bondage. He has come spontaneously to the experience of true freedom, which derives from acceptance of the total existential situation in which I find myself. "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content."⁵

Zen techniques, like all contemplative techniques and like the techniques of psychotherapy, are designed to produce illumination, insight. They are attempts at shifting the "mental centre of gravity" from the ego. "Social conditioning," says Watts, "fosters the identification of the mind with a fixed idea of itself as the means of self-control, and as a result man thinks of himself as 'I'—the ego. Thereupon the mental centre of gravity shifts from the spontaneous 'original mind' to the ego image. Once this has happened, the very centre of our psychic life is identified with the self-controlling mechanism. It then becomes almost impossible to see how 'I' can let go of 'myself', for I am precisely my habitual effort to hold on to myself. I find myself totally incapable of any mental action which is not intentional, affected and insincere."⁶

This is an excellent description of the dilemma of existential death. Fearful, anxiety-ridden attempts at self-control and at manipulation of the environment lead to sterility of life, the dither of indecision and the loss of individuality and spontaneity in the conformity towards the image of *Das Mann*. It is part of the Nausea—the opposite of what it is to be "in Christ".

Artists are especially concerned with freedom from "encapsulation". It is the awakening of "vision" in the artist that provides the genuine impulse to paint. Every artist who cares about his own "vision" is then faced with the problem of how to be true to it; how to paint as "himself". He has to absorb the traditions of painting and yet he desires to produce original and individual work. Many artists describe how the painting "takes over"⁷; how necessary it is to "forget" all that you have learned; to abandon the existenz which one has accepted; how valuable it is to be "possessed". Picasso, for example, says that when he is painting the "line becomes visible in the exact place where it is required" with such certainty that it is as though he were communing "with a presence already there".⁸ Picasso puts down on his canvas the "sudden visions" which force themselves upon him. "I don't know beforehand," he says, "what I shall put on the canvas, even less can I decide what colours to use. Whilst I'm working I'm not aware of what I'm painting on the canvas. Each time I begin a picture, I have the feeling of throwing myself into space. I never know whether I'll land on my feet. It's only later that I begin to assess the effect of what I've done".

Zen teachers have stressed this need for naturalness and spontaneity perhaps more than any other contemplative school, although, of course, it is an emphasis found within contemplative theology in all the great world religions, as also within psychotherapy. Guntrip, for example, in his *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self*,⁹ points out that loss of spontaneity is a mark of mental ill health and especially characteristic of the schizoid personality in whatever walk of life he is found.

One of the most valuable contributions to modern psychology is that of Rogers¹⁰ (*et alii*), whose experiments in the relationship between pathological conditions and perception have led him to the conclusion that human behaviour is radically affected by the way we perceive ourselves and the way we perceive the realities about us; i.e., by the existenz with which

we identify. As changes occur in the perception of self and in the perception of reality, changes occur in behaviour. "We discover," he writes, "that the way in which the person sees himself, and the perceptions he dares not take as belonging to himself, seem to have an important relationship to the inner peace which constitutes adjustment".

It is the Super Ego that places the quality of our perception in jeopardy; the conditioning social influences, which stand between the ego and experience. It is these influences which Roquentin was sloughing like an old, outworn skin. The aim of psychoanalysis and the aim of religion is the sloughing of this skin. "The aim of psychoanalytic thought," writes the American psychoanalyst, Bakan, "is the production of greater freedom for the individual, releasing him from the tyranny of the unconscious, which is, in Freud's view, the result of social oppression". This tyranny, of course, is not created by the Id, but by the Super Ego, the product of "social oppression".

Artists and prophets have always known what Rogers and his colleagues have rediscovered—the intimate relationship between insight, vision and behaviour. The poets of the Old Testament, for example, were aware of it and of how our "original mind" becomes overlaid by the knowledge which the world gives. It was no coincidence that the apple with which Eve was beguiled came from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and that rejection from the Garden of Eden and loss of Innocence attended upon her eating it. The discrimination between good and evil marks the beginning of disintegrity and the loss of spontaneity. The disintegrating Knowledge, provided by the Super Ego, produces the world of *Maya*—of measurement and division, and, therefore, of illusion and delusion.

To discriminate good from evil is to presume to stand in the place of God. Radhakrishnan, in his commentary on the *Gita*,¹² points out that this is the message that Krishna offers to Arjuna. A man is to be "a flute under the fingers of God". Only God may truly distinguish good and evil, as only God may give or take away life. The essential nature of good and

evil may be known, therefore, only by revelation, i.e., by illumination. Virtue does not reside in the deed then, as Aquinas also reminded his readers, but in the motivation behind the deed. Virtue is a kind of atmosphere and deeds are neutral events for the doer ; their virtue deriving from their motive ; a fact overlooked by Pelagians. This is the basis of the central discussion on Faith or Works in the New Testament and raised again by Luther and wherever religion is seriously discussed. "We are saved not by works, lest any man should boast, but by faith through the grace of God."

Depth psychologists have confirmed this ancient teaching. No one may be more concerned to do "good" or be "in the right" than the unfortunate person suffering an anxiety neurosis or a depressive melancholia, but his life becomes all the more disordered until he recognises the self-destructive and malignant unconscious factors which motivate his attempts at altruism. Moreover, let it be emphasised that this is not merely a problem for the evidently disturbed. It is a problem for everyman. "If our life is based on ignorance (*avidya*—ignore-ance)," writes Radhakrishnan, "however altruistic our conduct may be, it will be binding". Paul expressed the point more poetically:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am sounding brass and clanging cymbal . . ."

Freedom is freedom from the need to select some existenz rather than others. Freedom is freedom from the "Law" and involves that *metanoia*, which the church translated as repentance ; the willingness to be transformed. "Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Radhakrishnan wrote that for him spiritual freedom consisted "in the transformation of our whole nature into the immortal law and power of the Divine. Equivalence with God and not identity is emphasized. The freed soul is inspired by Divine knowledge and moved by the Divine will. He acquires the mode of being of God. His purified nature is assimilated into the Divine substance. Anyone who attains this transcendent condition is a yogin, a realised soul, a disciplined and har-

monised being for whom the Eternal is ever present. He is released from divided loyalties and actions. His body, mind and spirit, the conscious, the pre-conscious and the unconscious, to use Freud's words, work flawlessly together and attain a rhythm expressed in the ecstasy of joy, the illumination of knowledge and the intensity of energy."¹³ This is the Life "in Christ", it is a Hindu's account of the doctrine of the hypostatical union, described so well, for instance, by St. John of the Cross in his *The Living Flame of Love*.

Inner, individual freedom, freedom from internal friction and inner conflict is one of the most important qualities, also, of Nirvana, the goal of the follower of Buddha. Johansson, in his *The Psychology of Nirvana*, declares that to the Buddha "only the development of the individual was important and nibbána meant individual freedom, even from society."¹⁴

Ordinary morality is based often on little more than social taboos, that is on the fear of that social isolation which the contemplative regards as the ideal breeding ground for spiritual emancipation. Edward Conze, in his *Buddhism*, comments that whilst the "yogin" is still under the influence of the fear of the taboos of his society, he has not gained "freedom of spirit". "During that stage of their spiritual progress," he writes, "in which they still feel bound to the moral rules of their social environment, they may find that it is salutary to break their attachment to the warmth of tribal approval. Such revolt against social restraint is called 'Anti-nomianism'. It has made its appearance at different times in all religions and in Buddhism it is not confined to the Tantras, but it is also observed among the Amidists and in the Ch'an. Immoral conduct is therefore a perhaps necessary stage of transition for the attainment of a-moral conduct."¹⁵ Such conduct is one way of temporarily rejecting the social existenz so that its crippling hold on the mind may be released.

A similar idea is found in Jewish mysticism in the notion of the Master of Return, which Fromm describes in his book, *You Shall Be As Gods*.¹⁶

There are four basic positions in ethics: Legalism or categorical morality, which is the morality of codes, commandments and laws; casuistry, which permits the breaking of law without condemnation when the circumstances are seen to justify or explain the action; situation ethics, which abandons legalism in an attempt to introduce the yardstick of love and, finally, antinomianism.

Antinomianism is sometimes dismissed as an excuse for licence—which, of course, it may well be. But it has been expounded by responsible and serious people and is at the very heart of the contemplative and psychotherapeutic approach to man. It is the only ethic compatible with the notion of *being* “in Christ”. It is also the ethical standpoint of existentialism, especially as presented by Sartre. His position is by no means irresponsible. On the contrary, his concern for freedom leads him to believe that respect for other people’s freedom is the soundest basis for community living. “I cannot make my own freedom my aim unless I make the freedom of others equally my aim. Freedom is the foundation of all values”.¹⁷ This is the position of the Unitarian.

Freedom and *engagement* are two sides of the same coin for Sartre. Freedom requires, as Roquentin had not recognised until his experience of the tree, involvement. How close Sartre is here to the Christian teaching that it is only in “His service” that “perfect freedom” is to be found.

Sartre will admit of no universal laws or principles of conduct or absolute categories of right and wrong. Legalism, casuistry and situation ethics, for all their differences, in the end are based on some such principle, since even the adherents to situation ethics have to determine what they understand by “loving behaviour” and in this they must fall back upon reason rather than intuition, illumination or revelation. They determine what is loving behaviour by holding an inquest.

Laws, commandments, codes of conduct are, as Paul said, “milk for babes”. They have value as a “pedagogue” and are especially useful in the absence of a capacity for creative,

intuitive spontaneity. They meet the need of *Das Mann*, the once-born child by the schizoid personality and by the conformative pressures of society. In fact they have little to do with genuine morality at all, as any psychotherapist or spiritual director knows, who has spent years uncovering the doubtful motives which often lie behind altruistic behaviour and respectable, socially acceptable behaviour.

Psychotherapists discover that their patients may be led into “immoral” or “socially undesirable” behaviour, which is appropriate to a particular phase of their development or maturation. Overt stealing or even violence may be evidence of “progress”, especially if the behaviour is directed against, say, a dominating parent, when this is the patient’s first expression of resentment or his first stand against years of repression and suppression.

The patient is rebelling against the very “Law” that has robbed *him* of his own most precious possession—his individuality or “original mind”. The “Law” has prejudiced his chances of knowing what it means to be “in Christ”. It has split his existenz. His protest is both a cry for help and a necessary exercise in “self”-assertion against the factors which have maimed him. Here the psychotherapist, St. Paul and Chuang Tzu may join hands. Paul said that the knowledge of Sin came through the “Law” and that without the “Law” we would not even know what Sin was. Chuang Tzu likewise described how man’s original serenity became impaired by the coming of the sage’s “Law”.¹⁸

Paul, of course, does not blame the “Law”. He considers it a “good”. But it must be kept in its place, otherwise it “kills the spirit”. Similarly, the aim of psychotherapy is not to flaunt the “Law”, but to free people from its inhibiting influence. To break one existenz in order to make others evident.

For contemplative theologians, as for psychotherapists, evil is the sourness of life divided against itself. Evil is division and Goodness is that orderliness or harmony of the psyche, which

the church calls "holiness". Goodness is that which promotes growth, which facilitates the maturational process ; evil is that which stands in the way. At any point in his life-history a man may be led from the highway of "correct" behaviour into the tangled undergrowth of the left-handed path. His diversion may well prove "good for his soul". It may also destroy him. That is the "razor's edge". The many bones scattered in the courtyards of Doubting Castle bear witness to those who have perished in the journey.

We are taught, however, to fear not him who may harm the body, but him who may damage the soul and whilst the broad highway appears safe for the traveller, it too has many pot-holes which open onto hell and it does not lead where it promises. The lame and the halt, unable to maintain the pace required, are left behind. The individual paths are more difficult to follow, but here the traveller searching for the Kingdom finds himself presented with yet another paradox:

"Those who set out for it alone will reach it together and those who seek it in company will perish by themselves".¹⁹

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- ² Kierkegaard, *Journal*, p. 112.
- ³ Luke 4: 18.
- ⁴ Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 137.
- ⁵ Philippians 4: 11.
- ⁶ Watts, *Way of Zen*, p. 163.
- ⁷ cf. Barber, *Conversations with Painters*.
- ⁹ Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena*, pp. 254 and 163.
- ⁸ Berger, *Picasso*, p. 136.
- ¹⁰ Rogers, *Personality*, pp. 111 ff.
- ¹¹ Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and The Jewish Mystical Tradition*, p. 170.
- ¹² Radhakrishnan *Gita*, p. 68 ff.
- ¹³ Radhakrishnan *Gita*, p. 76.
- ¹⁴ Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana*, p. 135.
- ¹⁵ Conze, *Buddhism*, p. 196.
- ¹⁶ Fromm, *Ye Shall be as Gods*, pp. 168 ff.
- ¹⁷ Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 82.
- ¹⁸ Chuang Tzu, p. 106.
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TOWARDS A UNITARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

By TONY CROSS

KATHARINE HILBERY, the heroine of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* is the daughter of a "literary" couple who treasure the memory and live among the relics of Katharine's grandfather: the Great National Poet. To Katharine has fallen the office of custodian of the shrine: she displays the holy relics to distinguished pilgrims. Familiarity with the "facts", real and apocryphal, of her grandfather's life, her charge of the "little inner room with the pictures and the books," has bred an inevitable staleness in her own piety. At the following point in the narrative, in a moment of *aperçu*, Katharine suddenly *sees* afresh the portrait of her grandfather—the image "comes alive" for her:

"Feeling unable to decide the question, Katharine glanced at the portrait of her grandfather, as if to ask his opinion. The artist who had painted it was now out of fashion, and by dint of showing it to visitors, Katharine had almost ceased to see anything but a glow of faintly pleasing pink and brown tints, enclosed with a circular scroll of gilt laurel leaves. The young man who was her grandfather looked vaguely over her head. The sensual lips were slightly parted, and gave the face an

expression of beholding something lovely or miraculous vanishing or just rising upon the rim of the distance. The expression repeated itself curiously upon Katharine's face as she gazed up into his. They were the same age, or very nearly so. She wondered what he was looking for; were there waves beating upon a shore for him, too, she wondered, and heroes riding through the leaf-hung forests? For perhaps the first time in her life she thought of him as a man, young, unhappy, tempestuous, full of desires and faults; for the first time she realised him for herself, and not for her mother's memory. He might have been her brother, she thought. It seemed to her that they were akin, with the mysterious kinship of blood which makes it seem possible to interpret the sights which the eyes of the dead behold so intently, or even to believe that they look with us upon our present joys and sorrows. He would have understood, she thought, suddenly; and instead of laying her withered flowers upon his shrine, she brought him her own perplexities—perhaps a gift of greater value, should the dead be conscious of gifts, than flowers and incense and adoration. Doubts, questionings, and despondencies she felt, as she looked up, would be more welcome to him than homage, and he would hold them but a very small burden if she gave him, also, some share in what she suffered and achieved. The depth of her own pride and love were not more apparent to her than the sense that the dead asked neither flowers nor regrets, but a share in the life which they had given her, the life which they had lived."¹

There are three main elements in this "coming alive" for Katharine of her grandfather's portrait: first, her grandfather appears no longer mediated through her mother's remembrances, but as a contemporary, a young man perhaps agitated by the same experiences, "unhappy, tempestuous, full of desires and faults"; secondly, his image prompts an imitative response in her: "The expression repeated itself curiously upon Katharine's face as she gazed up into his"; thirdly, it makes possible

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*, Penguin Modern Classics, pp. 297-8

for her an authentic act of devotion: no longer a perfunctory act of homage, but a bringing to him of "Doubts, questionings, and despondencies." It is hard to say exactly why this has happened to Katharine, though it occurs at a time of crisis in her relationships when there is great uncertainty and self-questioning. At such a time, the impulse to project ones "Doubts, questionings, and despondencies" would be understandable and a suitable point of reference outside the turmoil of the self would be eagerly seized upon. For Katharine, unexpectedly, this picture serves as just such a point and so "comes alive" for her.

I have quoted this fine passage at some length because it provides uncannily close parallels with certain modes of apprehension of religious truth. A modern example, quoted in David Anderson's *Simone Weil*, will illustrate what I mean. Simone Weil was taken by her parents to Portugal for a holiday, following a collapse of health, and one day wandered off by herself. She came upon a little fishing village during a festival and heard the women singing, in procession, a traditional hymn which moved her deeply by its "heart-rending sadness". Suddenly she became aware that Christianity was a religion of slaves. Now, without doubt, much of the poignancy was within Simone Weil herself—but there was also a genuine correlation of feeling. In a moment of insight, the inner nature of Christianity "came alive" for her as if it spoke to her own anguish and sense of alienation.

When the "Greeks" came to Philip (John 12: 21) with the request: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus", we are not told whether that request was granted or, if so, what their reaction was. Presumably, the desire to see Jesus might have proved something of a minor disaster or, at least, an anti-climax: "such an ordinary, ordinary man" (Turgenev). But then so much depends upon the inner disposition and prior attitudes of the sight-seer. When we, in our turn, wish to see Jesus, we

² D. Anderson, *Simone Weil*, S.C.M., 1971

suffer from *embarras de richesse* in terms of material: the iconography of various Christian traditions; countless re-presentations of the "historical Jesus" (of the making of which there still seems to be no end), and, ultimately, the Gospels, our primary sources. When we say, *vis à vis* the Gospels, that we wish to see Jesus, what does our request involve and what fulfilment of our wish is possible?

Bultmann, in *Jesus and the Word* wrote: "History, however, does not speak when a man stops his ears, that is, when he assumes neutrality, but speaks only when he comes seeking answers to the questions which agitate him."³

Obvious dangers threaten in such an approach. Did Katharine really see her grandfather or merely a convenient image upon which she projected her own perplexities? Did Simone Weil really hear what the hymn expressed or merely an irrepressible echo of her own melancholy psyche? George Tyrrell in his *Christianity at the Cross-roads* (1910) warned the followers of Harnack against seeing in the Gospels merely a distant reflection of a liberal Protestant face. Sixty years later, Ernst Käsemann in *Jesus Means Freedom* is making essentially the same point when he writes admonitorily: "We are now paying heavily for the fact that German Christian people . . . made him (Jesus) a bourgeois after their own image."⁴ Such warnings are salutary and I would not seek to defend gross distortion in interpretation or blatant imposition of subjectivity. However, I remain unshaken in the conviction that there can be no valid or vivid historical reconstruction without an empathy based upon a true correlation of experience between the historian and the history under consideration.

A recent broadcast talk by Hugh Trevor-Roper on "Sir Walter Scott and History" will illustrate this point. He claims that, for example, Scott's presentation of Claverhouse in *Old Mortality* is "far more convincing than the work of the Scottish historians". As a novelist, Scott was able to beat the historians

³ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 1958, p. 12

⁴ Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, 1969, p. 29

at their own game because he could set aside their partisan presuppositions, had a more generous appreciation of human motivation, went direct to the original sources—using, for example, a portrait of Claverhouse in his reconstruction of the man.

Hugh Trevor-Roper says: “To see the past on its own terms ; to deduce it directly from its spontaneous records, widely defined . . . to respect its autonomy, to sympathise with its coherent assumptions, and at the same time not to surrender to mere nostalgia or lose one’s position in the present—this requires a nice balance of imagination and realism.”⁵

Trevor-Roper undoubtedly derives these principles from his experience as a working historian and they would help us in any project to see Jesus in the Gospels. Such principles do not ignore the basic, inescapable historical questions: did this event occur? what was this man’s role? what did his contemporaries make of it? But it further underlines the point that there can be no valid or vivid history without empathy.

Bultmann in *Jesus and the Word* deliberately excludes the Gospel of John as a source for his presentation of Jesus’ teaching. Most students of the New Testament will understand his ruling of this book ‘out of court’! It is perhaps not only a desire to enter a caveat for this Gospel which prompts me to discuss a section of the Johannine narrative, but also a wish to strengthen my argument (if possible!) by using the book which is furthest removed in date of compilation from the life of Jesus. So I take the account of Jesus’ healing of “a man blind from his birth” because I believe, with Ernst Käsemann, that sometimes the most legendary and least “historical” episodes in the Gospels give us a true reflection of Jesus’ teaching. As Käsemann writes: “There are paintings that seize the essentials even better than photographs . . .” Such a “painting” is to be found, I believe, in the 9th chapter of John’s Gospel.

⁵ H. Trevor-Roper, “Sir Walter Scott and History”, *The Listener*, Vol. 86, No. 2212, p. 227

James Drummond in *Johannine Thoughts*—a book which is still to be found on the shelves of Unitarian libraries—shies away from the question of historicity here in chapter 9 and hints at his own belief that “the narrative is a kind of parable, telling of the removal of spiritual blindness.” I agree, of course, though it seems to me that there are here several strata of symbolic meaning—not that I believe the author to have deliberately constructed a dramatic parable divorced from historical reality. “John” has deeply meditated upon the person and the mission of Jesus, presenting us with a figure of towering authority and significance whose deeds are the works of the God who sent him: he brushes aside Sabbath law to do a miracle of healing; his marvellous work of mercy throws his opponents into confusion so that they are forced to deny plain facts in order to uphold their “orthodoxy”; the man who is healed is spurned by them and received by Jesus.

Bultmann, in a mocking passage in *Jesus and the Word*, obliquely attacks the representations of Jesus that speak of him “as a great man, genius, or hero”; he, Bultmann, will have no truck with Jesus “as inspired nor as inspiring, his sayings are not called profound, nor his faith mighty, nor his nature child-like”. We may heed Bultmann’s warning without being too intimidated. A recent book by the veteran British scholar, C. H. Dodd, entitled: *The Founder of Christianity*, is bold enough to include a chapter with the daring title: “Personal Traits”—an indication of how far the most cautious scholars have already travelled along the path of the new quest.

Bearing in mind Bultmann’s warning, how does Jesus “come alive” for me in this episode of the healing of the man born blind? The main impression is of bitter conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees with the latter displaying an inquisitorial temper—indeed, the parents of the man who has been healed are forced thereby into evasive replies. Here is a dramatic contestation between rival authorities and the irate traditionalists even resort to one of the ultimate sanctions of ecclesiastical discipline: excommunication. The Pharisees demand that life

conform to the logic built upon their preconceptions: this Jesus is a sinner, *ergo*, he cannot do such signs. This is a line of reasoning which crops up again and again in the history of religion. One of the most notorious examples may be found in the contestation between Galileo and the Church authorities—despite experimental appearances, the earth *cannot* move because it is contrary to our tradition. “And yet it does move!”—these words are obviously related to: “. . . one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Once again incontrovertible experience clashed with tradition. “Would you teach *us*?” The scornful and defensive arrogance of ecclesiastical authority may be heard in that rhetorical question.

But have I not already begun to make Jesus after my own image, or, at least, after the image of a challenger of “orthodoxy?” Am I not already reading into this passage my own and my religious community’s clash with traditional authority? Perhaps so, to a certain degree—but if this interpretation really does illuminate the passage, then it may be that my Unitarian temper has provided a legitimate approach or key. If I distort the episode somewhat, the interpretation is not radically unsound or implausible. Certainly, it would not be difficult to cite weighty additional evidence from the Gospels to show that Jesus is frequently presented as in contestation with the ecclesiastical authorities of the day.

A key episode in the Synoptic Gospels which would give additional support to such a reading is to be found in Mark chapter 10: 32-45 where the sons of Zebedee ask Jesus the favour of sitting “one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory”. Jesus warns of the martyrdom which lies ahead for those who would be close to him. The other disciples are indignant at the effrontery of James and John:

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them: ‘You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles, lord it over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*), and whoever would be first among you must be slave (*doulos*) of all.

For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

The enacted parable of the washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13 should be set alongside this Markan passage as a presentation of the nature of authority which the Lord exercises and his disciples must emulate. Here is no arrogant exercise of dominion, only a leadership which expresses itself in the humblest task of the diaconate and undertakes the most menial act of service. Such authority must provoke bitter opposition, contempt: it must arouse the hostility of the powers-that-be of Church and State simply by its demonstration of a better way. The disciple Peter cannot accept the *ministration unself-consciously*. It is the reaction to this diaconal authority which is so tellingly brought out in Dennis Potter’s controversial play: “Son of Man”.⁶

Perhaps again, I am reading into this episode my own distaste for “clericalism” and my indignant judgment of how gravely the churches have been corrupted by lust for lordship, for the exercising of dominion. Any ministry which dares to call itself Christian must be prepared to be judged by the example of the slave-Messiah.

Finally, I take a passage from Mark’s Gospel (2: 16-17) to indicate the way in which Jesus “comes alive” for me:

“And the scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ And when Jesus heard it he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Here the outreach of Jesus’ ministry is demonstrated as necessarily shocking, scandalous to the *bien-pensant*, a blatant provocation. The passage which immediately precedes the one which I have quoted tells of how Jesus called Levi, the tax collector, to be a disciple. Jesus thus deliberately includes

⁶ Dennis Potter, *Son of Man*, 1971

within the inner circle, according to the lists that are given, a collaborationist with the occupying power. We cannot help noting that at least one of the twelve, Simon the Zealot, had connections with the Resistance—a strangely assorted band of disciples! Then, in a significant juxtaposing of passages, the Markan narrative recounts how unfastidious Jesus was in his table-fellowship with outcasts: those who were not only not respectable but whose presences were ritually contaminating. But then, the Ministry of Jesus scandalises those who are secure within the bounds of their own complacent piety, but draws in the outsiders who are at least aware of alienation and deficiency.

What life or ministry or community calling itself “Christian” escapes judgment and correction by the “coming alive” of this Jesus: the Rabbi who not only addresses himself to the outcast, but involves himself intimately with them—who doesn’t patronise them but treats them as friends? He washes the feet of tax collector, zealot, traitor, without discrimination. He appears indeed not a good bourgeois!

Whereas Socrates died among his social peers: a dignified, even a “noble” death (if death can ever be “noble”!), Jesus was crucified between two “conspirators”—and, as C. H. Dodd writes in *The Founder of Christianity*: “No fouler or more agonising form of torture, perhaps, has ever been devised.”⁷ Truly, Simone Weil penetrates to the innermost heart of the Gospel when she calls Christianity a “religion of slaves”. Rabbi Jesus was himself an outcast, a servant, a slave-Messiah. Those who have experienced alienation know this Christ whereas the secure seldom recognise him: the latter have always brought their “flowers and incense and adoration”, but the former have known that probably a more acceptable offering is some share in what they have suffered and achieved—their “Doubts, questionings and despondencies”. Only a Christ crucified and so lifted up is able to convince us at last “that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it and I among others!”

⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*, p. 7

But, to return to Katharine Hilbery in Virginia Woolf’s novel: whereas there can be no reasonable doubt that Katharine’s grandfather was indeed a celebrated poet, there are authentic relics and the testimony of those who knew him, to prove it (I speak, of course, in terms of fictional truth), there is nothing so indubitable in the connection between Christian faith and this provoking, heretic Rabbi. The tenuous nature of this link was soon realised and reassuring words were written down: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20: 29).

Does it matter that there is ample room for scepticism about the historical Jesus? so little established fact about him? Bultmann writes: “I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources do not exist”.⁸ Since there is so little *established* historical fact, could we not simply turn the quest for the historical Jesus over to those with a taste for Biblical scholarship? How can a man’s Christian faith depend in some crucial manner upon the results of such research? Would it not be better to emulate Fritz Buri and develop a Christology which is cut loose from the moorings of historicity?

Norman Pittenger in a recent book: *Christology Reconsidered* (1970) has no doubt that such desperate measures would effectively destroy Christianity: “. . . the genius of Christianity lies precisely in the claim that the Jesus of history *is* the Christ of faith, the Christ of faith *is* the Jesus of history.”⁹ (his italics). If that had been more guardedly put, I would be in thorough agreement with him: the Christ of faith is firmly rooted in the Jesus of history. For, unless the word “Christian” be emptied of nearly all traditional meaning, it involves the belief that Jesus Christ indeed “suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried.” If we want to make the affirmation with

⁸ Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, 1958, p. 14

⁹ Norman Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered*, 1970, p. 33

Paul (2 Corinthians 5: 19) that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself", then it does matter whether Jesus existed, who he was and what he taught.

But does not such an assertion that "the Christ of faith is firmly rooted in the Jesus of history" plunge us into what Käsemann calls: "an unholy jumble of historicism and metaphysics"? Not, I think, if we keep our heads. The jumble is created largely by the failure to assess basic methodological principles. All history is shaped by the presuppositions and the methods of the historians. A recent much-publicised example has been the controversy over J. M. Allegro's *The Mushroom and the Cross*. It really is not good enough that eminent and respectable Biblical scholars should write magisterially to *The Times* to denounce the book. They surely need to indicate where their principles and methods differ from those animating Dr. Allegro's work. The trouble over the "assured results of Biblical scholarship" is that only those are assured who accept the basic presuppositions and methodology. Dr. Allegro is merely an example, the latest of a long line, of historians whose presuppositions preclude any reconstruction of an historical Jesus. His book seems to me (though I am no Biblical scholar) to illustrate some of the most disastrous features of *parti pris* historical reconstruction—he imposes a theory upon the sources, often forcing them into the Procrustean bed of his presuppositions; he fails therefore to view the past on its own terms or to respect its autonomy and his work is evidently lacking in the sympathy which would have enabled him to achieve historical "objectivity" so that he might represent Jesus and the contemporary Jewish culture. Even as rigorous an opponent of any reconstruction of the historical Jesus as Bultmann has written: "No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community."

Suppose that the portrait which "came alive" for Katharine Hilbery proved subsequently to be not of her grandfather after all. What would the effect have been upon her attitude?

Would she not at first turn from it as from a counterfeit image? Would not the sense of communion, of consanguinity, be very largely lost? Then, later perhaps, might she not look at it again and find that it did still express something of what she had once discerned in it? But the directness of response would be damaged and the impulse to worship would probably have lost most of its power.

Much the same would happen, does happen, to the Christian who comes to believe that the Jesus of the Gospels is so far removed from the historical Jesus that next to nothing can be known about him. The impulse to worship is almost totally frustrated by a thorough-going scepticism concerning the historical Jesus. I regard it as very damaging indeed to Christology to cut it loose from the historical Jesus, though I admit the possibility of a Christology based upon a wholly mythical Christ—in much the same way, I would admit the possibility of an ethics autonomous and divorced from metaphysics. However, both these enterprises would seem to me to be labouring under crippling disabilities.

Unitarian Christologists (if one may use such a convenient portmanteau term) have in the past fought persistently to re-integrate the schizoid image of Christ resulting from Chalcedonian Christology and against docetic tendencies in the worship of mainstream Christianity. The Unitarian protest against classical Trinitarianism was that it gravely damaged the idea of the unity of God and likewise our forefathers objected to doctrines of the nature of Christ which effectively obscured his full humanity. That is grossly over-simplified, but it is a not unfair summary. As Drummond wrote in *Studies in Christian Doctrine*: "... the Unitarian heresy consisted in maintaining that the sonship of Jesus was unique, not in kind, but in degree." Unitarians refused to have a doctrinal wedge driven between Jesus and themselves. The belated conversion of "orthodox" Christologists to something like this mode of presentation of the nature of Christ is bound to provoke rueful smiles among Unitarians. Norman Pittenger in *Christology Reconsidered*

speaks “for those who like myself would prefer degree to kind . . . ”¹⁰ Even John McIntyre who would perhaps not be altogether happy with Pittenger’s Christological proposals seems even less happy with any refurbished Chalcedonianism.¹¹ Having for centuries laboured to warn our fellow Christians against the distortions of “orthodox” Christology, Unitarians would indeed themselves be castaways if they abandoned the historical Jesus and floated upwards into cloudy existentialist regions with the mythical Christ. Only an historically rooted, psychologically plausible Jesus is adequate grounding for a Unitarian Christology.

In the Conclusion to his masterly analysis of the classical models of Christology, John McIntyre writes: “. . . Whence do models derive? The answer that commends itself to my judgment is that the creation of models is part of the function which imagination fulfills in theological activity.” Theology has been singularly slow to allow imagination a place within its sacred precincts; and one ought not to be surprised if as a result a good deal of theology has been correspondingly unimagina-
tive”.¹²

It should be abundantly clear by now how heartily I concur with those remarks. If a Christology fails to “bring alive” the Jesus of the Gospels, then it has utterly failed to justify itself. No doubt all models have their limitations when pressed (as they tend to be) into exclusive service, but some of them would seem to me to be quite “out of the running” in contemporary Christianity. Not only should imagination be permitted freely to play its role in suggesting Christological models (even, dare I suggest, to the extent of paying attention to a rock opera such as “Jesus Christ, Superstar”), but also the tradition of a particular religious community may provide valuable insights. Just as Katharine Hilbery had looked reverentially at her grandfather’s portrait on countless occasions, but it was only when there was a

real or imagined correlation of feeling that she actually “saw” it, so perhaps a community like the Unitarians with their long and sometimes bitter experience of being outsiders may perhaps be able to “see” more clearly the Jesus of the Gospels—heretic Rabbi, challenger of sacrosanct practices, provoker of the guardians of the *status quo*. Then there is also that correlation of feeling which brings Jesus to life in the worship of the Christian. Drummond gets very near to expressing this when he writes: “. . . in seeing into his (Jesus’) spirit we look at the same time into the deep things of God”. But only those can gaze into the spirit of Jesus who have also known rejection, alienation, betrayal, humiliation. It is the vulnerability of Jesus which Simone Weil understands and Bonhoeffer also (by virtue of his own sufferings in prison)—a vulnerability which leads us more deeply into understanding the meaning of the love of God. Here our Christology and Theology fuse in a model which proclaims how costingly God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

I have not considered it my task to evaluate the evidence for the historical Jesus: whether there was such a man, whether he did teach this or that doctrine, whether he claimed Messiahship or how he understood his mission. I do believe that we have evidence to settle such questions to a level of probability which is the best we can do by way of settlement of such historical problems. We cannot avoid the intensive study that such judgments entail. As John Donne puts it in “Satyre III”:
“On a huge hill, /Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will/
Reach her, about must, and about must goe/
And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so;” But I have tried to suggest that the imagination, the confessional tradition of the student of the Gospels is quite as important as a sound working knowledge of New Testament Greek and a keeping abreast of the latest Biblical scholarship. Without the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith is a gnostic cipher, but without the Christ of faith, the Jesus of history remains, like Katharine Hilbery’s grandfather, a possibly revered but dead image. Unless Jesus

¹⁰ Norman Pittenger, *Christology Reconsidered*, 1970, p. 112

¹¹ cf. J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, p. 112

¹² J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, p. 178

speaks to our condition and that condition predisposes us to hear Jesus speak, then we are like the Athenians, mentally and courteously reviewing all the latest theories: "We will hear you again about this." (Acts 17: 32). It has sometimes been supposed that such neutrality must be the ideal frame of mind in the historian, but I contend that it is as crippling and as self-deceptive as the *parti-pris* approach which bends the evidence to fit the omniscient interpretative theory. A Christology through which the Jesus of the Gospels comes alive might well prove of inestimable value in arriving at "objective" historical judgments concerning him.

I have called this chapter: "Towards a Unitarian Christology". If I have managed to communicate something of the way in which Jesus "comes alive" for me, then I will have also made a case for a Christology for Unitarians. No doubt many of my fellow Unitarians will wonder why I have bothered when long ago all "progressive" thought in Unitarianism abandoned the particularity of Christianity and ceased to worship a God who reveals himself and reconciles sinners. As we Unitarians drift seemingly helplessly into the metaphysical vacuities of "Religious Humanism", perhaps we could pause for a while to consider whether Jesus Christ is really irrelevant. Certainly he speaks to my condition and I make no bones about it. To adapt some other words of John Donne: I have the distinct impression that God takes me by the hand as he reconciles us in Christ.

In conclusion, I glance once again at Katharine's apprehension of her grandfather finally to assert the parallels of the experience. Jesus, through a Christology developed along the lines I have suggested, "comes alive" for me as a contemporary, "unhappy, tempestuous, full of desires and faults"; so much so that I can no longer be content to worship him in a perfunctory

manner, but instead I bring him "doubts, questionings and despondencies"; and I find myself irresistibly drawn to take him as the governing model of my private and pastoral life, so that, ultimately, my manner of life should be "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1: 27).

Note

Although I still hold many of the opinions advanced in this chapter (written three years ago), I am no longer a Unitarian—I am a member of the Roman Catholic Church.—*Tony Cross.*

A NEW CHRISTOLOGY

By JOHN HOSTLER

DESPITE the wide diversity in both content and approach that they display, all the chapters in this book share the basic assumption that Unitarianism today stands in need of a new approach in its interpretation of Jesus Christ. This is no mere prejudice on the authors' part, for two of the chapters reveal very clearly that the whole subject of Christology has reached a crisis in its development at the present time. One may describe this briefly, and rather roughly, by saying that the "historical quest" has come up against the vast amount that we *don't* know about Jesus, while the "kerygmatic" or doctrinal approach to the subject is in danger of departing too far from what we *do* know about him. We are thus faced with a great opportunity of developing a new Christology for ourselves: indeed, it might rather be termed a challenge, to which other authors of this book have responded in their contributions.

The title of this chapter may be misleading if it be taken to imply that I, like them, have it in mind to propose some new interpretation of Jesus. Being neither a theologian nor an historian, any such proposal that I might make would probably appear naive and foolish, and therefore I shall not attempt it.

Instead, as a philosopher, it is my intention to examine the way in which we ought to develop a new Christology. If we, as Unitarians, are concerned to develop a new interpretation of Jesus, what are the standards of enquiry that we should bear in mind? What is to be our aim, and how is it to be achieved? These are the questions to which I shall suggest some answers in the course of this chapter.

I begin the enquiry in good philosophical fashion, by defining the subject of our concern. What *is* Christology? The answer to this question can surely best be found by considering the nature of its kindred subject, that of Theology. This, it seems, is the enterprise of providing a description of God: of saying what God *is*, not only in abstract terms but also by describing his purposes and his activity, his qualities of love and justice, and similar aspects of his nature. Analogously, therefore, Christology should aim to provide us with a similar account of the nature of Jesus Christ, even though the terms and ideas that we employ in doing so may be different. Moreover we may expect that Christology will say something about how our lives ought to be influenced by that of Jesus, just as Theology normally involves a number of moral consequences.

That there is a need for some form of Christology is apparent from the state of our historical records. Our main sources of information about the acts and teachings of Jesus are the Gospels, which are seriously incomplete: they tell us only of a number of comparatively isolated events in his life, which are sufficiently fascinating to whet our appetites for more knowledge about him. Therefore we may demand of Christology that it supplements or explains the Gospels in such a way as to reveal the "real significance" of Jesus—a phrase that I can best explain by a brief example. Imagine that we have two biographies of Napoleon, of which the first is no more than a factual record of the main events in his life, while the second seeks also to give us an insight into his character by mentioning such things as his ambitions and motives. When we read the first, we shall not know Napoleon as anything more than an empty figure who

did this and that. It is only when we read the second that we shall recognise him as a "real" human being—a man with hopes and fears, one to whom we may *react* with such emotions as love or hate. Now it is obvious that religion is more than history: it involves a strongly emotional element, in which such notions as commitment and faith far outweigh the importance of purely intellectual belief. It is therefore essential that if Christology is to be relevant to our religion, it must present us with a "biography" of Jesus that is like the second of those described, one in which he "comes alive" with an immediacy that demands some reaction from us. The Gospels themselves, of course, do this to a certain extent; but most of us feel the need for a suitable amplification of their account, that relates together the recorded events of Jesus' life in a way that further demonstrates his "reality" without degenerating into a largely fictional story.

If these observations are accepted as a reasonably accurate picture of what Christology is, we may turn to examine the question of why we should be concerned with it. Why, as Unitarians, are we interested in Jesus at all? The answer to this question will be seen to be of great importance, since it largely determines the way in which our Christology ought to develop.

Although it is always notoriously difficult to generalise about Unitarian beliefs, I think it is nevertheless true to say that our interest in Jesus is not normally the same as that of the orthodox Christian. By "orthodox" in this context, I mean the Christian who subscribes fully to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Redemption: who believes, quite literally, that a man's sins cannot be forgiven by God unless he acknowledges Jesus to be the Divine Son, who became incarnate and was crucified as a necessary condition of his "taking away" the sins of the world. Such a belief clearly involves a conception of Jesus as the instrument of God's purpose, in the very strong sense in which it is true to say that that purpose (of forgiving sin) could not be accomplished without the mediation of Christ. The effect

of this, however, is to make this "orthodox" interpretation of Jesus an essential premiss in a strictly theological argument, for it is only thus that the Christian can reconcile his belief in an omnipotent and benevolent Creator with the evident presence of sin and evil in the Creation itself. Consequently it is impossible for the Christian to develop his Theology without a Christology, since any attempt to describe the purposes of God without reference to the mediating power of Christ will involve him in apparently insoluble difficulties.

By contrast with this position, it seems quite possible for the Unitarian to pursue his Theology and Christology as wholly independent enquiries. Whatever may be his precise belief about the nature and forgiveness of sin, it normally involves a *non-mediated* relationship with God, and he is unlikely to have a "faith in Christ" comparable to that manifested by the Christian as I have described him. This negative conclusion clearly demonstrates that the Unitarian's interest in Jesus must be fundamentally different from that of the Christian. But if so, of what kind can it be? There seem to be only two possibilities. If we describe the Christian's interest as being in Jesus as essentially *divine*, it will be natural to say that the Unitarian is interested in him as essentially *human*, understanding this in a sense in which it does not exclude some general relationship to God that we may believe all men to enjoy.

If this conclusion is accepted, we must regard our interest in Jesus as being fundamentally like that which we might have in any other historical figure. At this point, I wish to introduce an arbitrary distinction by saying that this interest may be either in what such a person *said*, or in what he *did*. I recognise, of course, that in practice it is impossible thus to divorce these two elements in a person's life, and this point will be seen to be of importance later; but for the moment, it allows me to characterise two possible Christologies. The one that centres its attention on the sayings of Jesus I shall call our First Enquiry, while the other, primarily concerned with his acts, will be referred to as the Second Enquiry.

Let us assume that we have adopted the first of these Enquiries, and see how we are to proceed. It is worth noting that this is not a purely hypothetical possibility, since there are many Unitarians who think of Jesus as "The Master" whose main claim to our attention lies in the worth of his moral teachings. It cannot be denied that there is a distinctive "Christian Ethic" recorded for us in the Gospels, and it will be the main task of our Christology to describe this in a meaningful way. It will consider such questions, for example, as the extent to which the elements of this Ethic can be found in earlier sources with an eye to determining the originality of Jesus himself. Arguably, it must also say something about the worth of this Ethic: whether we are right to take it as a standard of conduct, or whether there is some other system that is morally better. There are immense philosophical difficulties involved in this kind of comparison among ethical systems, which I do not propose to discuss here; instead, I shall make two observations that are of more general relevance to our proposed Christology.

The first point is that we surely misconceive the whole nature of Jesus' teachings if we take them as expounding an ethical *system* that could be compared with some other code of conduct. For it is the most distinctive feature of his message that the possession of "righteousness", understood to consist in qualities such as charity and humility, can entirely replace a conscious obedience to a code of moral rules. Jesus was suggesting that an ethic of virtue could replace one of law, and in this respect was opposed to the tradition of the Old Testament. Even though his teaching of "do to others what you would have done to yourself" has the form of a moral rule, it is not so in fact: it is rather a maxim that distils the essence of charity, which it is each man's duty to apply in the particular situations in which he finds himself. The fact that Jesus' message is essentially one of the importance of virtue gives it an immense generality which makes its comparison with some other ethic extremely difficult. For example, some people have thought that since Jesus and his disciples appear to have practised an elementary form of communism it is only within a

socialist society that his teachings can be fully obeyed; but reflection will show that it is perfectly possible to be charitable and honest, to avoid greed and envy, and generally to fulfil the spirit of Christianity, no matter what kind of society one happens to inhabit. Jesus thus teaches what is strictly a moral *outlook* rather than a moral code, and it is one that appears to be very difficult to challenge seriously.

The second point I wish to make concerns the fact that Jesus presented these views as a means to the attainment of the "kingdom of heaven". Like many other moralists, he seems to have thought that moral and spiritual rectitude would have desirable results; but in his case, the end that is envisaged is some kind of psychological fulfilment or well-being, since we are also told that it is "within us". I think that this is an area in which our Christology might make some real advances, perhaps even presenting the "kingdom of heaven" in more modern terms. Obviously we must avoid the trap of preaching it is a psychological panacea, but other chapters in this book make interesting suggestions as to how we might think of this state that is to be reached by obedience to the Christian Ethic.

These observations, however, are overshadowed by one further feature of our First Enquiry that is of paramount importance. It is, that if the moral teachings of Jesus are *all* that we are interested in, then historical questions about his life become totally irrelevant. This consequence may be demonstrated in the following way. Imagine that somebody discovers a scroll by the Dead Sea which establishes, beyond all historical doubt, that Jesus himself was a mean and grasping man, a deceitful rogue—in fact, a pathological maniac. In the light of this discovery we conclude that what are recorded as his teachings are in fact the inventions of some other person. What happens to our approval of these teachings in such a case? The answer is, surely, that it is unaffected: we continue to regard them as wise and good, and simply give someone else the credit for them. It would be irrational for us to do anything else, since our horror of infanticide would not be diminished even if

the same scroll proved that Herod was a nice old man who loved children. Admittedly, the supposed discovery of this document would seriously affect many of our beliefs about the authenticity of the Bible, but it ought not to shake our faith in the *moral* authenticity of the teachings of the Jesus-figure recorded therein: the question of who preached the Sermon on the Mount, if indeed it was delivered at all, is irrelevant to deciding whether we should do what it says.

The consideration of these interesting possibilities carries with it a number of important conclusions. One of them is that the distinction between the Unitarian and the Christian is further emphasised. Such a discovery as we have envisaged would destroy the Christian's faith at its very foundations, since he would be forced to conclude that the Son of God had never in fact become incarnate as he had previously believed. By contrast, it would at least be possible for the Unitarian to continue in his admiration of the Christian Ethic while admitting that Christ himself never existed. A more important conclusion, however, is that our First Enquiry is not Christology at all. If it is possible for us still to approve the teachings of "Jesus" when he himself is known to have been despicable—or even never to have existed—what we are doing is clearly not presenting the picture of the man, which I initially argued should be our aim. On the contrary, our First Enquiry is really moral philosophy, and our calling it "Christology" merely serves to obscure this important fact. We seem thus to have gone disastrously astray in our endeavours, since what I described as our first possible Christology, apparently a plausible and useful enquiry, has ended up as a different subject altogether.

At this point, I turn to consider how we should proceed if we adopt the Second Enquiry, which is primarily interested in the acts that Jesus is recorded to have done. For this, of course, we have to assume the historical authenticity of at least the majority of the Gospels, since it is essential that at least somebody did some of the things there mentioned if we are to have any material to work on. Now when we consider the events

of Jesus' life, we discover an interesting variety among the kinds of things that he did. There are, firstly, many of his actions which seem to exemplify his ethical teachings: for example, one might regard his treatment of the woman taken in adultery as an instance of the kind of behaviour recommended in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Secondly, there is a group of actions which do not seem to display any extraordinary morality, even though they are undoubtedly virtuous: I have in mind Jesus' frequent healing of the sick. If I were endowed with an apparently effortless power of restoring the halt and the blind to health, I would regard it as merely a matter of common duty not to withhold its benefits entirely from those who need them: it is the power itself that is extraordinary, not the degree of moral virtue displayed in its exercise. Lastly, there are actions such as the miracle at the wedding in Cana or Jesus' walking on the Sea of Galilee, which do not seem to have any moral relevance at all.

This diversity among the acts of Jesus presents us with the problem of selection. Are we to devote equal attention to all of them? If not, which ones do we select? There are good reasons why it is pointless to concern ourselves mainly with the miracles that Jesus performed. For in the first place, there are many people who find it impossible to believe in miracles at all, and who would explain those of Jesus as the natural reaction of an essentially superstitious age to a man who was felt to be different from his fellows. And in the second place, if we are interested in Jesus only as a miracle-worker, we might as well worship the Wizard of Oz.

Yet if we reject this alternative, and concentrate instead on the acts of Jesus that have a specifically ethical importance, we are again involved in difficulties. For it is surely impossible to decide the moral worth of an action without paying at least some attention to the *motive* with which it was done. For example, it makes a vast difference to our interpretation of what Jesus was doing in overthrowing the tables of the money-changers in the Temple if we suppose that, so far from sanctifying the place,

he was trying to set up a financial monopoly of his own. Yet if the motive is clearly so important, how is it to be determined—if not by considering what Jesus *said* on this and other occasions? A man's actions are always ambiguous in themselves, needing to be interpreted in the light of what we know of his views and character.

The conclusion is thus reached that an attempt to pursue our Second Enquiry, into the acts of Jesus, must lead us to include with it the First also, into what he said and taught. I now wish to argue that the same conclusion is reached if we reconsider the observation I made earlier, that our First Enquiry could continue unaffected if it were discovered that Jesus had not existed. It was Plato who remarked, in his *Republic*, that an ideal does not become invalid if it cannot be realised; and although this is strictly true, it should not obscure the fact that such a possibility may detract from the *practical* worth of an ideal that is itself concerned with conduct. In the present case, we do have such a moral ideal presented in the teachings of Jesus. Assuming that we agree that it *ought* to be attained, our immediate question is to ask whether it *can* be attained. Is it really possible for us to behave as Jesus says we ought to? A negative answer to this question should not diminish our intellectual approval of the ideal, but it will naturally destroy our practical interest in it, given the weaknesses of human nature. We therefore need an affirmative reply to the question; and this can be provided simply by turning to our proposed Second Enquiry. For this tells us that there actually was a man who fulfilled the ideal during his life on earth, who behaved time and again exactly in accord with the precepts that he himself taught. Moreover, my initial assumption that we should regard Jesus as essentially *human* carries with it the requisite assumption that we too are at least potentially capable of emulating his degree of virtue.

It is to be noticed that this coincidence of our two Christologies invites the Unitarian to think of Jesus in a way that is analogous to the Christian's conception of him. The Christian,

as earlier described, regards Jesus as an instrument employed by God for the fulfilment of his purpose of forgiving human sin. Likewise, the Unitarian may come to think of him as an instrument employed for God's purpose of showing us the path of righteousness. He may view Jesus as being a concrete ideal: a man who, by his special virtue and piety, demonstrates that it is possible for the rest of us also to synthesise our moral and religious lives into a happy and harmonious existence. This view differs from that of the Christian mainly in the single respect of believing any man to be capable of the same relationship with God that Jesus himself enjoyed.

My argument has thus reached a point at which it is evident that neither of the two possible Christologies which I have discussed can stand alone. They have been considered separately, and each has been shown to be incomplete without the other. Unless I have missed some other possibilities, we must therefore conclude that there is only one way in which we can interpret Jesus, and that is to conceive him as we must do any other human being: as a man whose words and deeds are to be taken together in the process of building up a full picture of his nature, in order that we may respond to his being with a truly human involvement. To the extent that this result coincides with my initial description of what Christology is, it may be taken as evidence for the correctness of that redefinition.

In conclusion I wish to point out that this "blueprint" for our Christology does not lay down more than very general rules about its content. It does not say that the picture that we eventually present of Jesus must be like this or that; it merely says that the picture must obey certain rules of composition if it is to be relevant to our faith. I have tried to avoid the presentation of my own ideas as to what such a picture should be like, partly because they would be out of place in a chapter of this nature, and also because I believe others to be better fitted for the task. Whoever may undertake it, however, will find that he is confronted with a wide range of possible interpretations. Jesus is in many ways a singularly enigmatic figure, and there

are perhaps almost as many ways of understanding him as there are men who wish to do so. For some, he is the gentle Master, friend of children ; for others, he is the impassioned prophet and political revolutionary. This diversity is no doubt a consequence of a personal reaction to Jesus, the fact that he must "come alive" on any successful Christology.

Yet this feature of the subject may be found worrying by some, who will regard it as vitiating the whole attempt at interpretation. They may argue that it shows there can be no *true* picture of Jesus, and that therefore we should not try to find one. To take this line is, I believe, seriously to misconceive the whole nature of truth in this situation. For what is "the truth" about any person that you know? Apart from the things he says and does, there is, and there can only be, the way in which you and others *react* to him: what you conceive to be his motives, hopes, fears, and so on, which are necessarily a matter of personal assessment. Similarly, if the person of Jesus is presented to us with sufficient immediacy, each of us will have, and must have, his own reaction to him ; and this, so far from being a source of doubt or worry, should be a source of pride for us. For Unitarianism has always recognised that the truth about many things is infinite. It is a faith founded on the assumption that the "truth" about God cannot be written down once for all, but consists in the awareness of God that each man discovers in his inmost heart. So also it must recognise that the "truth" about Jesus, as about any one of ourselves, is equally infinite: it involves an immediate and personal response, and in this consists so much of its significance. This indicates for us the final duty of the Christologist. He must give us a picture of Jesus that is soberly founded on available fact ; and though he is challenged to present it in a way that will portray him as being really "alive", he must do so with recognition of the fact that he is not thereby discovering a truth with which others should agree, but rather presenting an interpretation in the hope that others may find it helpful in formulating their own reactions to the person of Jesus Christ.

JESUS AND THE ENCOUNTER OF WORLD RELIGIONS

By JOHN A. MIDGLEY

SINCE its very beginnings, the Christian faith has been confronted with the problem of other world religions. The earliest disciples, apostles and evangelists were aware that there existed the traditional religion of Ancient Egypt, the gods of Greece and Rome, and a variety of pagan cults. In addition, the relationship between Christianity and the ancient faith of Judaism constitutes one of the major features of early Christian history. As the centuries have passed the problem of the existence of other faiths has grown in importance, and since the days of the Christian Missions, the issue has been a crucial one.

The Christian Missionary movement was a courageous and confident enterprise. The conviction was held, and is still held by many, that if only enough missionaries could be sent to enough parts of the world, it was only a matter of time before all men were converted. This dream inspired the setting up of a multitude of Missionary Societies, and many brave men and women, obeying the commandment to be found in Matthew 28: 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," set off to foreign parts, to bring light to where, it was believed, there had formerly been darkness.

A favourite missionary hymn, written by Reginald Heber (1783-1826) Bishop of Calcutta, contains the following lines ;

What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's Isle,
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile ;
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strown,—
The heathen in his blindness,
Bows down to wood and stone.

This hymn still appears in many hymn-books.

The history books reveal the measure of the missionaries' success. There are Christian churches of various kinds and strengths in India, Africa and China, as well as South America, the East Indies and what was formerly the British Empire. But since those early days, two main factors have contrived to transform the whole question of sending out missionaries from a matter of practicability to a matter of principle. The main question is no longer, "How can this best be done?"—but "Should this be done at all?"

The first of these factors is the discovery, made by many, that the missionaries were often not preaching to ignorant heathens, but to men and women who had a highly sophisticated and profound faith of their own, and one often with many centuries of tradition behind it. To be sure many of the tribes of Africa and India and South America were primitive folk in the grip of immature and dangerous superstitions. But it was when he came into contact with the intelligent Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim that the missionary's whole purpose came into question. For here was no blind heathen bowing down to wood and stone and waiting hungrily for Christ, the Bread of Life, but a man with a deep, secure and satisfying faith of his own.

The second factor which has brought the whole question of missionary work into question is a more recent phenomenon. For a number of reasons the Western world has come to recognise that for anyone merely to proclaim a doctrine or ideology or way of life and to impose it upon others is not only highly suspect but extremely dangerous. The evil which such ideological imperialism can bring about has been demonstrated to us by our experiences, (to chose two extreme examples) of Nazism and Stalinism. So, in many instances, it has come about that when the Christian Missionary, set as he inevitably was in western European culture, proclaimed his one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, it was very difficult for his hearers not to confuse this with empire-building, both ideological and political.

These factors have raised enormous problems for many Christians which have not yet been resolved. Missionary Societies, the World Council of Churches and various other Christian conferences have many times turned the issues over. The Vatican Councils, held during the nineteen sixties, proposed a more cautious approach to evangelism among other faiths. But no really clear way forward is evident. For the first main problem, that of the encounter with other sophisticated faiths brought into question the supposed uniqueness and superiority, from a theological point of view, of Jesus Christ. Missionaries had been taught that the history of the world began with the chosen people of Israel, and that in the fulness of time, according to his purposes and plan for mankind, God had sent his Son to usher in the final and complete kingdom, in all wisdom and truth. So to discover that there were other faiths, with their own leading figures, prophets, teachers and saviours, made much of the preaching untenable.

The second, more recent factor, that of the suspect nature of proselytising, raises difficulties which are less easy to define. For from the earliest days, Christians believed that their faith was not a collection of ideas dreamed up by man, but a unique revelation. They regarded, as many still regard, the faith as a supernatural revelation of the total meaning and purpose of the

universe. Therefore they were able to be confident and unhesitating in their proclamations. So to discover that it is neither intellectually respectable nor politically safe to claim dogmatically that Jesus Christ is the absolute and unquestionable truth, puts the missionary at a gross disadvantage. Proselytising is falling increasingly out of favour in many many spheres, and as Lesslie Newbigin has put it,¹ there isn't really any difference between proselytising and evangelising, (except that proselytising is generally regarded as something that *other people* do!) But if there is no proselytising there is no evangelising, and if there is no evangelising there is no gospel. Or is there?

The main stumbling-blocks for Christians of orthodox persuasions seem to be the nature of the beliefs concerning Jesus. There are two attributes of Christ, according to the traditional scheme, which lie at the root of the difficulties I have briefly outlined; the claims of *uniqueness* and *universality* of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For when absolute uniqueness is claimed, then the possibility of any alternatives ceases to be a point of any relevance. If the claim of uniqueness is rigorously held, then the claims of neither Hinduism, Buddhism nor Islam are worthy of even the most superficial examination. Similarly, if the evangelist is fully convinced of the universality of the salvation which Jesus Christ is believed to offer, then he need have no hesitation in evangelising or proselytising. In his view it must be good if it brings salvation to all men.

However, the dubious nature of these two fundamental claims is now so manifest, and the acute difficulty and danger of any activity which seems like proselytising is now making the task of the missionary so difficult that a whole new re-thinking seems to be required. The crucial question seems to be, can the Church in any way come to terms with the problem of other world religions by amending the traditional beliefs concerning Jesus? Does this amount to a hopeless weakening of

the claims of Christianity? There have been, and still are those who answer an uncompromising "No!" to the suggestion of softening or amending these two main claims concerning Christ's significance in the world. Their attitude is clear, and understandable enough. But is it the only attitude consistent with a firmly based faith?

In fact it is not. There are a number of alternatives, which we shall briefly examine.

A slightly less blunt view concerns the theory of the development of world religions towards a time of total fulfilment. Instead of simply saying that Christ is true and all other religions are false, there is a theory that religion is developing and will continue to develop over the centuries. It has risen, this theory claims, from a primitive state to a higher state. Its latest and finest manifestation is Christianity. This view has certain attractions, as it can be seen from a study of the history of religions that there has been considerable development. Unfortunately for the Christian, however, this theory is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons, the simplest of them being this. The adherents of other faiths can just as easily claim that *their* religion is the finest and most recent manifestation.

Another view of other world religions is that God has granted a general or universal revelation to all mankind, but this has been distorted by human sin. The work of the Christian missionary, then, is to endeavour to fulfil the original divine revelation by adding to it the knowledge of Christ, which is regarded as a special revelation. Unfortunately, this interpretation also has grave shortcomings. For it raises the question as to why God should grant other religions sufficient revelation to make them idolatrous, but not quite enough to save them.

All of these approaches to world faiths begin with a fundamentally negative view of any religion other than Christianity, be it implied or manifest. Those who hold such a view may or may not be rigoristic in their practices, but even so, the

¹ Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, 1969

basic presumption is that the Christian faith is the truth and all others are false.

On the other hand there are some Christian attitudes which are, so to speak, positive in tone. These are less frequently held by missionaries but are often the product of the academic discipline known as Comparative Religion. This discipline has grown enormously in the twentieth century, and now holds a prominent place in several universities and other educational establishments. It is now possible, for the first time in history, for anyone to read reliable translations of the scriptures of all the major faiths, and study their history and significance.

There are serious difficulties, however, in the study of comparative religion, difficulties which form, in some respects, the other side of the coin, so to speak, from those which the missionaries have to face. The main problem lies in trying to find an approach to the subject, so that one may study in depth, while at the same time holding on to a faith of one's own. This will not be easy, as the student may well be attracted to and impressed by elements in his subject of study, one or other of the major faiths, which correspond to his own religion, and thereby earn his approval. In doing this, he may overlook significant features which happen to be those which do *not* earn his approval. On the other hand, he may be so affected by novel elements in a religion hitherto unfamiliar to him, that these may seriously undermine his own faith. Again, he may be inclined to extract himself from the practical issues, and adopt a lofty academic position. Or he may be so impressed by the fact that there is truth in all religions that he may lose the inclination to subscribe to any. He may even fall into the trap of trying for some kind of eclecticism, or syncretism. This is the view that all religions are basically the same, with only regional or historical variations. This latter view ignores the fact that there are profound differences between the religions that should never be overlooked.

For all of these, and many other reasons, the study of Comparative Religion has been regarded as suspect in many quarters. As Ronald Knox said, "There is nothing like a course in Comparative Religion for making a man comparatively religious."²

In order to avoid such implied criticisms, what is needed, it seems, is an approach to other world religions, both for the purpose of study, and, if we feel inclined, for missionary work. Indeed the situation has changed in a most interesting and important respect, in that we no longer have to travel to foreign parts to meet representatives of other faiths. The post-war years have witnessed a steady inflow of adherents to other faiths into our country as immigrants, in addition to the already well-established Jewish communities. It seems clear that a sound approach must be found, to aid both the student of religions and the missionary. For it is still arguable that there is a continuing place for missionary work of a kind. There remain, for example, large areas where immature and dangerous superstitions hold sway, which Christianity should endeavour to eradicate. A great deal of what we term Black Magic, Ju-ju, and various forms of witchcraft are still practised, based entirely on fear and irrational superstitions and inhibitions. In many instances, what is clearly needed is work with a strong educational and cultural slant to it. But even so, the religious aspect is still important in its own right.

So the Christian need never abandon the view that there is immense value in spreading knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus and his followers among all men. Likewise, little but good can come from a study of the life and teaching of the central figures of other world faiths. This kind of interchange of knowledge could, given appropriate circumstances, be a major contribution to mutual understanding and world peace, but there are pitfalls to be avoided if this kind of encounter of world faiths is to take place.

² Quoted by E. J. Sharpe in *Comparative Religion in Education*, 1970

Indeed, for many, a major intellectual reappraisal and reconstruction of their attitudes may be necessary, and this can be a painful if salutary process. By way of comparison, one cannot help but recall the major re-appraisal of the Old and New Testaments which was undertaken after the work of Charles Darwin.

The first thing to be said is that there is a sense in which the term unique can safely be applied to Jesus, and that is in human terms, in regard to his life and teaching. The Christian may, if he is disposed to do so, claim that Christian ethics, stemming from the life and teaching of Jesus, are superior to any other system of ethics. This claim should be made, however, not as an *a priori* assumption, but one based fairly upon analysis and comparison. Behind such an analysis, if it is to be really fair, should lie an inherent respect for other world faiths, so as to avoid any accusation of mere partisanship. The Christian must recognise that even if he feels that Jesus has unique and universally valid attributes, there are other teachers, prophets and saviours who claim the same kind of respect from their disciples. If it is to be presented or defended at all, Christianity must be supported on its own inherent merits, spiritual, ethical and religious.

One rather picturesque way of approaching this problem was once expressed by a Jewish Rabbi who at one time ministered in the multi-religious community of Manchester. He regarded his faith, he said, in much the same way as he regarded his mother. To him there could be no better faith than his Judaism, and no better person to be his mother. But he would not expect any man to say that his mother would be perfect for anyone else. He would not expect any man to say that his mother would be perfect for everyone. Likewise he would not expect anyone to make absolute claims for his religious faith. At best, each man's faith is best for him.

This is perhaps a mundane, rather naive illustration, but it makes the point, is useful and has much to commend it. It reflects the strong personal feelings that men and women

characteristically have towards their religion. In addition, one may hope that with maturity one may be willing to concede that one's faith, and one's mother, have their shortcomings, and that another man's faith, and mother, have some more commendable features than one's own.

Even this approach is not without its dangers, as we shall see, but it does demand a certain kind of open-mindedness, and yet at the same time it does provide a basis for certainty. One may feel the strength of one's own faith, and yet have sufficient respect for the faiths of others to be able to learn from them.

The danger in the approach, however, may be seen as follows. It may well lead to loose thinking resulting from an attitude of mind known as relativism. One believes, by this approach, that Christianity is true for us, but we cannot be so bold as to say that it is true for anyone else, since they must be the judge of that. The point against this approach, however, is that what is true for us *must* be true for everyone else, for that is what the *truth* means. If you deny this you are playing around with the word *true*, to suit your purposes.

At first sight then, if this last argument is correct, we are left with a hard choice to make. Either we say, with conservative orthodoxy, "Christianity is true and all others are false." Or we say that no-one can really know whether their faith is true or not, it is all relative.

Somewhere in between these two extremes, however, lies what may be called a liberal view of the truth of religions. This view deems it impossible for anyone to claim that they have the truth, absolute, and once and for all revealed. On the other hand, it does claim that adherents to a faith may be sure and certain as far as circumstances permit. We are aware that our views and convictions change as knowledge grows, and with the passing of time. On the other hand, there are some convictions which hold us with such a profound certainty that we cannot deny them. To be willing to hold both of these attitudes, and to regard them as opposite sides of the same coin, is to have a liberal view of truth.

The liberal-minded Christian, then, would say that he holds his own faith with adequate certainty, and yet not so rigidly as to preclude the possibility of truths in other faiths. He would hold his loyalty to Jesus Christ and all that he stood for, and do so with confident security. Yet he would not be so rigid in his views as to exclude the significance of other religious leaders.

This approach attempts to hold in view the fact that there are, undeniably, differences in the world's religions. At one time, as we have already noted, a good number of people believed that in essence all religions are the same, and are striving towards the same goal. This view can no longer safely be maintained. The profound differences in the world faiths must be honestly faced. The Buddha is not fundamentally the same sort of religious figure as Christ, nor Krishna, nor Moses, nor Muhammad. They come into entirely different categories, if it is possible to categorise such men at all. Certainly, to their disciples and followers, each means something different. The Buddha, for example, is the man who experienced a certain kind of spiritual enlightenment, the man who, as someone once put it, "woke up"!³ This makes him altogether different from Krishna, who is depicted as an *avatar*, a human manifestation of a God, which in turn makes him somewhat similar to but not precisely the same kind of divine object as Jesus who was not an *avatar* but an incarnation, a God-Man. Unlike Krishna, Christ, according to the traditional scheme, was very much a man among men, whereas Krishna never really parts with this transcendence. Different again is Moses, the leading figure in Judaism, but who is never worshipped. Likewise Muhammad, the prophet of God in Muslim thought, though the most esteemed of the prophets, is not worshipped as divine.⁴

Thus, in this most crucial aspect of the world's faiths, the nature and status of the leading figures, we can see already the profound differences which exist, and which must be understood

³ Huston Smith *The Religions of Man*, 1958

⁴ cf. *Avatar and Incarnation*. E. G. Parrinder, 1970

and appreciated. There are equally important differences in many other aspects of the faiths, and a technique for appreciating these differences more clearly is to be found in the method known as "dialogue." For this method, a number of representatives of the world faiths come together to talk about those aspects of their religions which they consider to be the most important. At first glance this would seem to be merely an opportunity for amiable discussion. However, if properly conducted, a really effective dialogue should be far more than that. To take part in a dialogue means to question and criticise, in the best sense, the beliefs of another person. But it also means to lay oneself *open* to questioning and criticism. It means that weak points in one's faith may be exposed, and this can constitute a tremendous challenge. Pre-requisites of such contact are openness and honesty, and it means that one is vulnerable, and likely to be learning as much about one's own faith as about anyone else's. And personal feelings can easily be hurt.

This discipline is a useful one, not simply as a means of teaching and learning, but because it presupposes an unbiased and tolerant approach to the subject, and requires *real* listening. It also respects differences and, properly understood and practised, should be able to survive sharp clashes of opinion and belief which will inevitably occur. But these should be valid differences, and not simply clashes of bigotry.

The liberal Christian, then, should have no hesitation in taking part in such dialogues, as the principle upon which they operate should chime in effectively with the liberal view of truth we have already described. Nor should he have any hesitation in giving his support to such organisations as The Council of Christians and Jews, The World Congress of Faiths and similar organisations, if such organisations promote opportunity for friendly contact and dialogue. Nor should the liberal Christian object to continuing the long-established Unitarian tradition of All-Faiths services of worship, so long as the pitfalls of eclecticism and syncretism are avoided.

For the real problem of the encounter of world religions lies in the simple fact that men and women hold most dearly to beliefs which, though seemingly true in their eyes, are not shared by others. The devotees of the differing world faiths admire, worship, perhaps even pray to and give their lives to leading figures who not only teach different things but are themselves different kinds of persons.

They are different, and herein lies one of the greatest challenges to thinking men and women concerned with religion in the twentieth century. If religion is to make any contribution to the search for peace in the world, or the restoration of human dignity, or an increase of the sense of the presence of God among men, then there must be mutual respect among world faiths. And this must come about *not* because of a belief that all religions are basically the same or can be made to seem the same. It must come about because of the fact that all religions are different.

FURTHER READING

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| O. C. THOMAS, 1969 | <i>Attitudes Towards Other Religions</i> |
| NINIAN SMART, 1966 | <i>World Religions: A Dialogue</i> |
| NINIAN SMART, 1971 | <i>Religious Experience of Mankind</i> |
| STEPHEN NEILL, 1970 | <i>Christian Faiths and Other Faiths</i> |
| E. G. PARRINDER, 1961 | <i>Worship in the World's Religions</i> |

Concerning Jesus

A group of young theologians have provided in this book a scholarly, yet readable, account of the way in which the life and personality of Jesus may be looked at in the twentieth century. The book provides a worth-while contribution to knowledge, and will take a place on the shelves of all libraries which aim to be comprehensively covering the attitudes of liberal-minded thinkers towards Jesus.

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